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Everyday Magic:
Fairy Tales in the Fiction of Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt

by

Lisa Michelle Fiander

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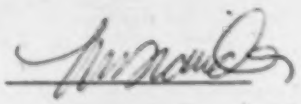

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis titled *Everyday Magic: Fairy Tales in the Fiction of Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt* submitted by Lisa Michelle Fiander in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Folklore scholars have identified the movement away from alienation and towards community as a nearly universal feature of fairy tales, and a characteristic of the German tales of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, among them. This dimension of fairy tales has made them useful to British writers Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt, who highlight a similar drive towards community in their fiction. In the works of these writers, fairy tales inspire characters who have withdrawn from social engagements to seek out more meaningful connections with family, lovers and the wider community. The Grimm brothers' "Hansel and Gretel" acquaints child characters and their parents with the risks involved in intimate relationships, including the anxiety, resentment and guilt which can dominate those bonds. Like the heroine of the Grimms' "Cinderella," characters who have distanced themselves from their relatives in the course of achieving adulthood are subsequently compelled to confront the impact of family on their lives. Animal-bridegroom tales, such as the Grimms' "The Singing, Springing Lark," and tales associated with them, such as "The Robber Bridegroom" and "Brother and Sister," teach protagonists about the risks involved in romantic relationships, although love might also produce powerful changes in a character's life; some break the habit of solitude in order to love, taking a risk which connects them strongly with a network of obligations to others that Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt have said characterizes a moral world. Elsewhere in the fiction of these writers, animal-bridegroom tales illuminate the conflict between selfhood and community. Finally, the tale "Briar Rose" enables Murdoch to explore romantic relationships and the autonomy and sense of equality that she feels are

essential to their success. In other works by these authors, "Briar Rose" illustrates for characters who are in retreat from society that relationships involve suffering and renewal, and that the only alternative is to withdraw entirely from the pleasures of living. The movement in this fiction away from isolation and towards community reflects an affirmative view of humanity that is central both to fairy tales and to the works of these three writers.

Preface

In Iris Murdoch's *The Flight From the Enchanter* (1955), the second of her 26 published novels, the mysterious Mischa Fox describes his belief in "the way in which magic can be part of ordinary life" (Murdoch, *Flight* 192). Murdoch (1919-1999), and her contemporaries Margaret Drabble (b. 1939) and A.S. Byatt (b. 1936), make reference to the magic of fairy tales in their fiction to show characters moving away from isolation and alienation and towards community. That journey, and the ways in which fairy tales are used by these authors to describe it, are, however, charged with ambivalence in the fiction. Characters in the works of these authors feel the attractions of a solitary existence. Many protagonists have a distant relationship with their families, are involved in romances that have been based on fantasy and illusion, and are anxious about participating in a wider community that will judge them. If certain characters surrender to the temptation to withdraw from the complexities of modern life, however, happiness in these novels seems to be reserved for those who resist. Furthermore, in the worlds described by these authors, the pursuit of relationships is intimately connected with a moral life. Although the three writers have stopped short of calling themselves optimists, their encouraging view of modern humanity, as inspired to seek out meaningful relationships with others despite the difficulty of those engagements, serves to set them apart somewhat from other contemporary British novelists.

Folklore scholars have remarked on the movement towards community in fairy tales. Writing about the German fairy tales of the Grimm brothers, cultural materialist Jack Zipes notes, "It is interesting that the Grimm protagonist is nothing alone, by him or

herself, but becomes omnipotent when assisted by small creatures or outsiders" (Zipes, *Brothers* 81). Jungian Marie-Louise von Franz observes that it is "exceedingly frequent" that a Grimms' fairy tale begins with a family situation that is characterized by gender imbalance: a king with three sons, for instance, or a heroine with a stepmother and stepsisters but an absent father. Such tales typically end with a marriage, she says, indicating that the imbalance has been corrected, and that there is now "a balanced union of the male and female elements" (von Franz, *Interp.* 51). Freudian Bruno Bettelheim proposes that fairy tales reassure readers when they show alienated characters, such as the third son who lacks an inheritance, making friends and getting married: the tales describe "the isolated man who nevertheless is capable of achieving meaningful and rewarding relations with the world around him" (Bettelheim 11). Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt draw upon this essential theme of fairy tales to show previously isolated characters striving to establish or re-establish connections with family, lovers and the larger community.

The scholar who undertakes the task of writing about Murdoch's novels will find herself in something like the position of Tim Reede, the unsuccessful painter in Murdoch's *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980); like Tim, one is tempted by the many different styles on offer, and risks the failure to make significant contributions using any of them. As Peter Conradi has noted, early reviewers of Murdoch's novels complained, with some justification, that there was "too much" (Conradi 4) in her books. The novels tend to be long and to involve a great number of characters, whose complex relationships of blood and marriage sometimes take the entire 607 pages (in the case of Murdoch's epic 1987 novel *The Book and the Brotherhood*) to sort out. Her whirlwind stories conceal "moral

maelstroms" at their centre, which require "hard work and attention" (Dipple 1-2) on the part of the reader who wishes to navigate them. Elizabeth Dipple begins her 1982 study, *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit,* with the admission that the prospect of reading a new novel by Murdoch has often made her "cringe" (ix). When one adds to this mix the fiction of Drabble and Byatt, whose work is very different despite their being sisters, and the complex field of fairy-tale scholarship, the question of how best to approach this literature becomes even thornier. Furthermore, as I will establish at greater length in my Introduction, one meaningful way of comparing these three writers is by examining the irony and ambivalence which inform their work, and which complicate references to fairy tales in their fiction. Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt seem to simultaneously challenge and celebrate the prescriptions for social engagement that are outlined by fairy tales.

Among the choices that I had to make in this project was my decision not to discuss at length Murdoch's philosophical writings, which have already been the subject of animated debate and the focus of at least three full-length studies.[1] Philosophy occupied a significant part of Murdoch's career as a writer, although it was a dimension of her work that she tried to keep separate from her fiction. Murdoch began to teach philosophy in 1948, first at Oxford, and then at the Royal College of Art in London, retiring in 1968 to write full time. Besides novels, she wrote four books of moral philosophy: *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953), *The Sovereignty of Good* (1971), *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (1977) and *Acastos: Two Platonic*

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[1] A.S. Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom: The Novels of Iris Murdoch* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965); Barbara Heusel, *Patterned Aimlessness: Iris Murdoch's Novels of the 1970s and 1980s* (Athens: U of Georgia, 1995); Elizabeth Dipple, *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) – on Plato.

Dialogues (1987). Murdoch said that her fiction had been influenced by Sartre and Wittgenstein, as well as by Plato, Kant and Simone Weil.

However, her critics have called for a distancing of Murdoch's philosophy from her novels, as has the author herself. Elizabeth Dipple has said that "criticism of her novels must, I think, break loose from the compelling frame Murdoch has given" (Dipple 37). Peter Conradi has outlined for Murdoch scholars "[t]he necessary job of discriminating between her works," arguing that "the work is not an illustration of theory, though it may well comment on it" (Conradi 257). Deborah Johnson offers her opinion that all of Murdoch's novels "pose their own questions and do not need to be explained with reference to some supposedly more authoritative text" (Johnson 3). Murdoch herself said that "I mention philosophy sometimes in the novels because I happen to know about it, just as another writer might talk about coal mining," but that "I don't want philosophy, as such, to intrude into the novel world at all and I think it doesn't" (Biles 116). She argued, "My novels are not 'philosophical novels'" (Meyers 217).

Although it can be argued that her philosophical studies are not essential to an understanding of her novels, Murdoch's emphasis on moral concerns in her fiction has certainly alienated some readers. Lindsay Tucker recognizes that Murdoch's preoccupation with "banalities" like "goodness" may "seem out of place in this postmodern age" (Tucker 9). Murdoch scholars have on occasion found her "moral probings" to be "tedious and pretentious" (Fletcher 26). Murdoch's focus on community, and on the moral life made possible by relationships among people, at a time when British fiction would seem to have lost interest in moral considerations, forges the most important connection between her and two other British women novelists – Drabble and

Byatt. Drabble has similarly drawn criticism for the "austere politics" that some say are to blame for certain "banalities" in her novels, such as her depiction in several of the gulf between the rich and the poor (Wood 15). Reviewers of Byatt's novels, meanwhile, have found her "old-fashioned moralizing" at odds with her "postmodern self-consciousness" (Hulbert 38) about fiction and fictiveness, which they seem on the whole to prefer.

While the central role of morality in their work connects these writers, they are associated in other ways besides. All three are prize-winners: Murdoch and Byatt each won the Booker Prize, Murdoch in 1978 for *The Sea, The Sea* and Byatt in 1990 for *Possession*. Byatt has written repeatedly and admiringly of Murdoch – including *Degrees of Freedom* (1965), a book by Byatt on Murdoch's early novels – and reviewers frequently compare their fiction. Murdoch reviewed one of Byatt's novels.[2] Byatt said, upon Murdoch's death in February 1999, "something in my life that was the most important thing in my literary life, has ended."[3] Frederica Potter, in Byatt's *Still Life* (1985), fantasizes as a Cambridge undergraduate that she will write "a new urban novel like those of Iris Murdoch" (Byatt, *Still* 283). Drabble has Frances Wingate, in *The Realms of Gold* (1975), reading a novel by Murdoch while waiting for one of her children to have his appendix out (Drabble, *Realms* 11). And the fact that Drabble and Byatt are sisters naturally tempts one to compare their work, although in interviews both seem reticent to discuss their relationship: Byatt has said, "It is . . . hard to have shared memories with another writer" (Dusinberre 190). But the moral concerns that these

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[2] Iris Murdoch, "Force Fields," rev. of *The Virgin in the Garden* by A.S. Byatt, *New Statesman* 3 Nov. 1978: 586.

[3] "An esteemed author, philosopher, and a creator of characters," *Daily Telegraph*, Feb. 9, 1990.

authors share, and the way in which they use fairy tales to illuminate them, are what interests me most in the intersecting of their fiction.

Each chapter of this essay examines a Grimms' fairy tale or set of related tales, and a novel by each of the three authors that makes use of that tale and its themes. I focus on the Grimms' fairy tales in this project, although my Conclusion briefly analyses these three writers' rather different response to *The Arabian Nights*. Many contemporary English-speaking novelists incorporating fairy tales in their work show a greater familiarity with the German tales of the Grimm brothers than with the earlier French versions of Charles Perrault – whose *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* in English translation swept England in 1729 – or with Russian or Italian tales, or with *The Nights*. This is true of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt as well. In some cases, these three writers' borrowing from the Grimms' tales is made explicit, while elsewhere their characterization suggests that it was the German tales that inspired them. The Grimms' versions of old stories that have counterparts in many traditions have had a peculiar hold on readers around the world for centuries. Contrary to popular belief, the Grimms were not the founders of folklore as a study in Germany, or the first Germans to begin collecting and publishing folk and fairy tales. However, each of the Grimms' editions of *Kinder- und Hausmarchen* sold out, and by the 1870s the Grimms' tales had been incorporated into the teaching curriculum in parts of Germany and were also included in primers and apthologies for children throughout the western world, so that, by the beginning of the 20th century, the *Children's and Household Tales* was second only to the Bible as a best-seller in Germany, and it has continued to hold that position (Zipes, *Brothers* 15), as it has continued to fascinate outside the country of its origin. Although

all fairy-tale traditions involve sex and violence to some degree, the particularly bloody violence of the Grimms' tales has made them more interesting for some audiences, as I discuss at greater length in my Introduction to this essay.

Among the many versions of the Grimms' fairy tales available, I chose to base this study on folklorist Jack Zipes's 1987 translation for Bantam, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. Zipes has published eight books of critical readings of fairy tales that focus on the Grimms – scholarship which has also been useful to this project. Therefore, he is obviously sensitive to the demands of the material. He indicates in his notes that his goal in translating was to make the stories "historically more accurate"[4] than they are in other translations. Zipes's version is based on the final, seventh edition of the Grimms *Kinder- und Hausmarchen*, published in 1857. But he adds to these tales translations of thirty-two others that were omitted by the Grimms from the 1857 version, after they had been printed in earlier editions. Thus, every tale that has appeared in print under the Grimms' direction is featured in Zipes's translation. The extra tales include "Bluebeard," which the Grimms omitted from later editions "on the grounds that it showed too many signs of its French origins" (Tatar, *Hard* 157), according to Maria Tatar. I find the tale no less interesting or deserving of discussion, knowing that the Grimms changed their mind about it after publication. The Grimms' variant of "Bluebeard," and other German tales that resemble it, are discussed in Chapter Three of this essay. Zipes indicates how scrupulous he has been in his translation when he notes

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[4] Jack Zipes, "A Note on the Translation," *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. Zipes (1987; New York: Bantam, 1992) xxxiii.

that he has tried to convey even the failings of the Grimms' tales: their occasional "unevenness and variety in tone and expression," along with "contradictions" and "inconsistencies in the narrative structure," are maintained by him if changing them would require significant alterations to the text. Reviews of Zipes's collection when it first appeared remarked on his "meticulous" research (Heins 1157) and praised him for presenting an "unromanticized"[5] version which eschews "the romantic sentimentality" (Haase 277) of some collections. This last review that I have quoted, by Donald Haase in the *German Quarterly*, proposed that Zipes's work "deserves to become the standard translation" (278).

My emphasis here is on the themes of fairy tales rather than their form. As Swiss folklore scholar Max Lüthi suggested, although the fairy tale is certainly appealing as a work of art, it also provides "an answer to the burning questions of human existence" (Lüthi, *European* 84). This is where psychological interpretations of fairy tales come into play, setting aside considerations of form to illuminate what characters and motifs in the tales can tell us about our own psychological landscape. Inspired by Carl Jung's groundbreaking essay "The Phenomenology of the Spirit in the Fairy Tales," Jungians such as Marie-Louise von Franz have detected archetypes of the collective unconscious in the tales. Von Franz argues that the fairy tale "gives a model for living, an encouraging, vivifying model which reminds one unconsciously of all life's positive possibilities" (von Franz, *Interp.*, 63). Freudians have studied the tales for what they

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[5] Ruth Bottigheimer, rev. of *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. Jack Zipes, *Journal of American Folklore* 102 (Jan. 1989): 100.

illuminate about sexual drives and sexual development. In *The Uses of Enchantment* (1975), Bruno Bettelheim outlines this approach, suggesting that fairy tales depict "in imaginary and symbolic form the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence" (Bettelheim 73). Psychological approaches to fairy tales have been useful to this project, although I do not use them exclusively.

Other scholars have placed folk tales and fairy tales into a broader socio-cultural context. These approaches to fairy tales have also informed my work in this project, particularly in the seriousness with which they regard fairy tales, treating them as social documents rather than escapist fantasies. John Ellis in *One Fairy Story Too Many: The Brothers Grimm and Their Tales* (1983) and Iona and Peter Opie in *The Classic Fairy Tales* (1974) have tracked revisions of particular fairy tales over time. The Opies consider fairy tales applicable to modern life, a conclusion one might not expect of historians. They write, "On the face of it, the message of the fairy tales is that transformation to a state of bliss is effected not by magic, but by the perfect love of one person for another" (Opies 17). Cultural materialist Jack Zipes has examined the circumstances of production and reception of fairy tales and adaptations of fairy tales in particular communities, with an emphasis on the peculiar adaptability of the tales as vehicles for disseminating ideologies. This approach necessarily highlights connections between the fairy-tale world and our own. Zipes suggests that supernatural elements in the tales "represent metaphorically the conscious and unconscious desires of the lower classes to seize power" (Zipes, *Subversion* 8). Magic in the tales merely places an "emphasis on the capability of an individual to achieve success, despite overwhelming odds" (Zipes, *Brothers* 26). Meanwhile, Marina Warner's *From the Beast to the Blonde:*

On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers (1995) compares fairy tales to biblical stories and legends, in order to draw conclusions about what a range of popular stories have had to say about women's lives and women's roles. Although she uses fairy tales, as Zipes does, to illuminate the concerns of the society producing them, Warner resists the notion that the tales, which she says "bear witness against women" (Warner 210), recommend a way of living. Rather, she argues, the tales occupy a distinctly different world from our own, one infused with unearthly magic: "Fairy tales often claim the moral ground, but their spellbinding power lies with the enchantresses and giants, the magic, the wonders, the mishaps and the good fortune they relate" (11). Ultimately, the central arguments of Zipes and Warner have been less useful to me than other scholarship on fairy tales, since they focus on how various cultures have manipulated the moral assumptions of the tales that I believe furnish their principal appeal for Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt.

Navigating the many available theoretical approaches to fairy tales can be a bewildering process, as Maria Tatar explains:

> When one critic tells us that the dwarves in "Snow White" should be viewed as siblings of the heroine, another asserts that they represent the unconscious, and a third declares them to be symbols for creative activity, is it any wonder that the layman raises an eyebrow in bewilderment? And when we are further offered the option of looking at those figures as symbolic representations of the heroine's genitals or as a knot of homosexuals, it becomes difficult to stifle a protest. (Tatar, *Hard* 54)

The fairy tale powerfully resists our efforts to interpret it. Every narrow road to the tales must bend and divide around the disadvantages of that particular approach. Formalists

require that one view the tales as works of art rather than interesting stories, which can be limiting, as in Swiss folklorist Max Lüthi's argument that the characters in fairy tales are two-dimensional and lack any emotional life. (Agreeing with Lüthi requires one to set aside much of what is pleasurable about the tales.) Psychoanalytical approaches to fairy tales have an obvious appeal, although given minor differences among versions of a tale, such that an iron cooking pot in one version may become a straw basket in another, close analysis of details of the tales may at times seem beside the point. The pessimism of many socio-cultural approaches to the tales, meanwhile, can leave the reader interested in fairy tales feeling that interest steadily eroded by a growing awareness of decades of alleged interference and censorship on the part of the capitalist culture industry. The failure of any one of these approaches to fully accommodate what fairy tales mean to us has led scholars such as Alan Dundes to call for a more synthesized approach to reading folk narratives.[6] What Dundes has said about "the desirability of multiple interpretations" (Dundes x) in folklore studies informs my own comparison in this paper of various theoretical approaches to fairy tales.

This essay is divided into three sections, with each comprising two chapters on a related theme. Section One deals with family relationships, Section Two with love affairs and Section Three with the conflict between self and community. Because novels that focus on the self tend to feature characters in middle age, this arrangement works out to be more or less chronological. Drabble has said, "I like criticism to relate literature to life and how life is lived or should be lived" (Cooper-Clark 19), which describes my own

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[6] Alan Dundes, *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980).

preferences in literary analysis. But it is for reasons besides personal taste that I have chosen a thematic approach to the Grimms' fairy tales and to the fiction of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt.

Fairy-tale scholars do not always concentrate on the themes of the tales; the title of a study by Max Lüthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man*, illustrates how his interests were divided between formalist readings of fairy tales, like those of Russian Vladimir Propp, and an approach which sees them as providing "an answer to the burning questions of human existence" (Luthi, *European* 84). Furthermore, as Russell Brown notes in the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* (1993), focusing on theme in literature has been seen by some scholars as "a totalizing approach that implies the view of a literary work as a vehicle for ideas and as having one presiding idea" (Brown 643). But a thematic approach to the fiction and the fairy tales seems most appropriate here, given that Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt distinguish themselves among modern writers by arguing that fairy tales might offer comfort and guidance to a contemporary adult audience. The enduring relevance of those stories is, after all, made most clear in their universal themes – unhappy childhoods, dangerous romances, the struggle between individuality and community.

The interest these three writers have themselves expressed in consciously writing fiction with overarching themes – Murdoch said, "Books should have themes. I choose titles carefully and the titles indicate something deep in the theme of the book" (Meyers 212) – also underlines the appropriateness of a thematic approach to their work. Yet theme has not yet had the attention it warrants in the array of full-length studies available on Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt. The writers' use of symbolism has been explored in

Nora Stovel's *Margaret Drabble: Symbolic Moralist* (1989) and in Elizabeth Dipple's *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit* (1982). Religious attitudes in the fiction have dominated both Dipple's book on Murdoch and Suguna Ramanathan's *Iris Murdoch: Figures of Good* (1990), as well as Valerie Grosvenor Myer's *Margaret Drabble: Puritanism and Permissiveness* (1974). Feminist responses to the fiction of these writers include Ellen Cronan Rose's *The Novels of Margaret Drabble: Equivocal Figures* (1980) and Deborah Johnson's *Iris Murdoch* (1987). Authorial voice is the focus of Joanne Creighton's *Margaret Drabble* (1985), David Gordon's *Iris Murdoch's Fables of Unselfing* (1995), and the only two full-length studies on Byatt that are available: Kathleen Coyne Kelly's *A.S. Byatt* (1996), part of the Twayne's English Author Series, and Richard Todd's *A.S. Byatt* (1997). The association of these writers with the tradition of realism in British fiction, and their more controversial relationship with postmodernism, have been examined in Frank Baldanza's *Iris Murdoch* (1974), in the two books on Byatt mentioned above, and in the section on Drabble in Patricia Waugh's *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (1989). Although many of these studies have explored theme in an incidental way, it has not been their focus as it is in this project. And no published book or article has so far compared the three authors.

In Section One of the essay, which deals with family ties, Chapter One looks at the Grimms' tale "Hansel and Gretel" and its application in Byatt's novels *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996), Drabble's novel *The Waterfall* (1969) and Murdoch's novel *The Green Knight* (1993). The novels suggest, as does the fairy tale, that childhood is an ordeal, and that parents are often to blame for this. The use of "Hansel and Gretel" by these authors to illuminate anxieties about abandonment experienced by

child characters anticipates, in a way, the ambivalent relationship that adult characters in the novels have with isolation. What "Hansel and Gretel" implies about the "murderous resentment" sometimes occurring between children and parents is echoed by the experience of Frederica Potter and her son Leo in Byatt's two novels. Young mothers in novels by Drabble, such as Jane Gray in *The Waterfall* (1969), must undergo a painful examination of the extent to which they resemble and differ from their children, and "Hansel and Gretel" helps them in this regard. In each novel, it is implied that what characters learn in childhood about relationships will prepare them for the difficulties of adult entanglements. This is best illustrated by Murdoch's use of the Grimms' tale in *The Green Knight,* which describes teenager Harvey Blacket's efforts to free himself from his suffocating relationship with his mother in order that he might marry her friend Louise's daughter.

Given the general consensus among scholars that "Cinderella" contributes to female acculturation by rewarding passivity with marriage, it comes as something of a surprise that Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt should draw upon the tale to describe characters searching for identity, without recommending either marriage or passivity (rather the opposite, in fact), and without even restricting the starring role to women. This is the subject of Chapter Two of this essay. These novels highlight a feature of "Cinderella" which tends to be overlooked by scholars in favour of its marriage plot: in each case, characters striving to distinguish themselves from their families without breaking that tie completely are compared to "Cinderella," a tale showing a young woman alternately aided and impeded by family connections in her journey towards adulthood. Drabble uses "Cinderella" to illuminate the personal and professional

achievements of her character, Liz Headleand, in the trilogy consisting of *The Radiant Way* (1987), *A Natural Curiosity* (1989) and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991), without downplaying her ambition or the failure of her two marriages. In fact, it is clear that Liz has sacrificed close relationships in order to achieve success in her career, something that makes her less than likable. In Murdoch's novel *The Italian Girl* (1964), the tale of "Cinderella" clarifies the experiences of a male character dominated by his mother, with Edmund Narraway filling not just the role of the prince, as one might expect, but also that of Cinderella. When Edmund marries his nursemaid at the end of the novel, perhaps simply replacing one mother figure with another, an irony is introduced into Murdoch's use of the fairy tale. Byatt's Frederica Potter, the protagonist of the trilogy, *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996), is unaware of her resemblance to Cinderella until she has already married, at which point, instead of a stepmother, Frederica's husband Nigel figures as her oppressor, and escaping marriage, rather than entering into it, furnishes the climax of her tale. Unfortunately, Frederica's experience with Nigel seems to have caused her to lose interest in romance.

In Section Two of this essay, which deals with love affairs, Chapter Three examines risky romantic unions in fairy tales and in the works of these three authors, while Chapter Four looks at romances in Murdoch's novels alone. The most common interpretation of the many variants of animal-bridegroom tales – wherein a prince, made a beast by enchantment, is returned to his human form by the love of a woman – is that they show how we might be made over by love. The dangers to the woman implicit in this process are the subject of Chapter Three. Animal-bridegroom tales collected by the Grimms include "The Singing, Springing Lark" (the most similar to the better-known

French tale of "Beauty and the Beast," but with a lion in place of a "beast"), "The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich," "Hans My Hedgehog," and "Snow White and Rose Red" (where the bridegroom is a bear). Murdoch's *The Green Knight* (1993) uses animal-bridegroom tales to propose that love and marriage can dramatically change a person. In the novel, "beastly" men marry "innocent lambs" and the results seem to please everyone. However, some of the romantic unions celebrated at the end of *The Green Knight* show poor judgment, introducing an ambivalence into Murdoch's use of fairy tales in the novel. The risks involved in love affairs, rather than their positive results, dominate Byatt's *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996), the second and third novels of her Frederica Potter series. In the novels, Frederica looks back on her failed marriage to the violent Nigel Reiver and considers her degree of responsibility for what happened in their relationship. Her conclusions are illuminated by comparisons to "Bluebeard," which critics have suggested is connected to animal-bridegroom tales, along with the Grimms' "The Robber Bridegroom." In Drabble's novel *The Waterfall* (1969), animal-bridegroom tales contribute to the story of a shy woman seemingly transformed by a physical relationship with her cousin's husband. By the novel's end, the risks that Jane Gray has taken in love have revived her ability to write. Drabble's description of the relationship is charged with ambivalence, however, since the love affair with James initially threatens to overwhelm Jane, and then, finally, seems of minor importance compared to her writing.

Throughout Murdoch's novels, there is a recurring sequence wherein one person discovers another asleep, and falls in love with them, or feels an existing love confirmed. The scenes are strangely similar: typically, the room is dimly lit, the sleeper's hair is

spread on the pillow and one arm is flung outwards. The onlooker is typically seized by powerful emotions. The ancient story of the sleeping princess awakened by a kiss – the Grimms call her "Briar Rose" – has invited a range of interpretations. For Murdoch, however, the most obvious interpretation is the most powerful: the tale points out the difficult way to true love. This is the subject of Chapter Four of this essay. In Murdoch's *Bruno's Dream* (1969), *The Black Prince* (1973), *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974), *The Good Apprentice* (1985) and *The Green Knight* (1993), romances beginning with a sequence like this subseqently fail – the result, in some cases, of the lovers idealizing each other, and in others, of their intruding too much into each other's consciousness. In *A Severed Head* (1961) and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), relationships that have these problems at the start are salvaged by the characters when they realize the mistakes they have made. In Murdoch's world, loving someone requires surrendering myths about them, but also giving up the temptation to scrutinize them too closely. This means that characters in her novels sometimes get involved without knowing the other person very well at all, a fact which troubles her use of fairy tales that find resolution to characters' problems in happy marriages.

Section Three of this essay, focusing on community, explores characters' efforts to establish their own identity, at a point in their lives when they have already encountered and dealt with the difficulties of family and romantic ties. In Chapter Five, the psychoanalytic interpretation of animal-bridegroom tales is explored, wherein beasts represent divergent aspects of the protagonist's psyche with which he or she must come to terms in order to successfully undergo the process of individuation. The tales might also illustrate one aspect in particular of that process of individuation – the conflict that

arises between selfhood and community. This is a central theme in Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Drabble's *The Witch of Exmoor* (1996) and Murdoch's *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) – novels that show characters resisting being defined by their relationships with others. In Byatt's *Possession*, a writer who feels the attraction of community ties finally throws them off in order to pursue her art, but loneliness characterizes her later years. *The Witch of Exmoor* suggests that happiness rests in ignoring some standards of behaviour imposed by the community, a truth known only by the eccentric recluse Frieda Haxby, although Frieda's death – likely a suicide – complicates the lesson. In *The Philosopher's Pupil*, a man much discussed by his neighbours because of his bad temper and his abusive marriage comes to terms with the degree to which he has been defined by other people, and also seems to acknowledge the extent of his responsibilities to the community. The ending to Murdoch's novel suggests, however, that George McCaffrey has not really changed in any significant way. In each case, animal-bridegroom fairy tales enable characters to reconsider the conflict between individuality and community, although the conflict is a matter which all three novels leave unresolved.

In Chapter Six of this essay, novels by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt use "Briar Rose" to describe women who see advantages in holding onto a circumscribed existence, although there is no lack of princely suitors available to show them the way out. The isolation of each character has, in fact, less to do with relationships than it does with nameless anxieties about living amid the pressures of the modern world. Although highly imaginative characters are certainly important to the fiction of these writers, these novels illustrate the difficulty of leading a moral life, which, to Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt, is a life of taking action to improve one's lot rather than a life of quiet

contemplation. In Drabble's novel *The Realms of Gold* (1975), Frances Wingate, a world-famous archaeologist who has succeeded in her career despite the constraints imposed by an unhappy childhood, is plagued by depression, which she likens to a "stone in my chest" (Drabble, *Realms* 204). In Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Maud Bailey, a beautiful and renowned English scholar, is sometimes overwhelmed by the pressures of academia so that she fantasizes about "[a]n empty bed in an empty room" (Byatt, *Possession* 291), a vision that anticipates suicide elsewhere in Byatt's fiction. In Murdoch's *The Unicorn* (1963), Hannah Crean-Smith married the man she loved and moved into his country house, but guilt over an extramarital affair that he discovered has kept her a prisoner there. Attempts to remove Hannah forcibly lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of violence and murder. Each character has achieved success according to her own standards, but has now reached a point where she feels that she can advance no farther. While protagonists who take on the world are generally rewarded by these novelists, these three works remind the reader how much characters have to contend with when obstacles are comprised of their own attitudes rather than physical realities.

Byatt writes that, when she was growing up, she appreciated fairy tales for "the comfort of the inevitable ending . . . the happy ending against odds" (Fraser 128). The endings to fairy tales do not make every reader happy, however. Although attitudes toward class and race in the fiction of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt are not the focus of my essay, in the Conclusion I suggest approaches to those dimensions of their work, which invite further critical attention. University-educated, all three write from a position of class privilege when they describe their faith in European fairy tales. In the Conclusion, I depart from my examination of these writers' use of German fairy tales to

examine their rather different use of *The Arabian Nights*, and to theorize explanations for that difference. While Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt use European fairy tales throughout their fiction to address sometimes painful realities, one wonders why it is that *The Arabian Nights* – a loose association of Indian, Persian, Chinese and Arabic folk tales dating, in its written form, from the thirteenth century – describes for them the unreal, things that are incomprehensible, unobtainable, or fleeting.

One of the most appealing fairy tales is the Grimms' "All Fur," despite its description of shocking events. In the tale, a king mourning his wife's death decides to remarry, with their daughter as the bride. Horrified at the prospect of marrying her father, the heroine escapes to a neighbouring kingdom, where she takes a job in the kitchen as a cook's assistant. There, she produces a bread soup so fine that the king who eats it falls in love with her. Whatever lessons it teaches, whatever it reveals about a particular place and time, however it contributes to the history of artistic endeavour, above all, the fairy tale celebrates life. Brutal violence and troubling themes are present in the fairy tale, but its happy ending is more or less a certainty. This mixture of darkness and celebration also characterizes the fiction of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt, where lonely characters who have failed in their engagements with the world are nevertheless driven to keep trying to make meaningful connections with others. The result is a moving and encouraging vision of our troubled modern times.

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Introduction

References to fairy tales in the fiction of British writers Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt highlight the importance of human connection, in a modern world where people feel increasingly alienated and alone. Characters in their fiction are continuously tempted toward solitude and withdrawal. Typically, protagonists are distanced from their families, engaged in romances that have been based on fantasy and illusion, and reluctant to participate in a wider community that will judge their achievements. If certain characters surrender to the temptation to withdraw from what Anne Cavidge, a former nun in Murdoch's novel *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980), calls the "horribleness and dangerousness of life . . . . the warmth, the mess" (Murdoch, *Nuns* 242), happiness in these novels seems to be reserved for those who resist the attractions of solitude. Human engagement matters even more than that: in the worlds described by these authors, the pursuit of relationships is intimately connected with a moral life.

Fairy tales, which typically centre on the movement of an isolated hero into a community, inspire characters in this fiction to establish meaningful connections with others. There is, however, an ambivalence in these writers' use of fairy tales to illustrate this theme. Relationships are difficult for many of their characters, and solutions presented at the ends of novels tend to be imperfect, quite unlike the "happily ever after" endings we associate with fairy tales. In Murdoch's novels, loving someone truly means not prying too deeply into their inner life; this means that characters sometimes fall in love without really knowing each other. In Drabble's novels, characters seem eager to enter into relationships, but have trouble making them meaningful; her later novels centre

on friendly, middle-aged women living surrounded by their own and other people's children, yet plagued by loneliness and depression. Byatt's protagonists are more often than not reserved academics who have difficulty with relationships of any kind; frequently, the ending to a work finds them alone. But the general movement in these novels away from isolation and towards community reflects an affirmative view of humanity that is central both to fairy tales and to the fiction of these writers.

Numerous folklore scholars have identified community as an important motif in fairy tales. Freudian Bruno Bettelheim suggests that fairy tales, with their isolated protagonists – orphans, retired soldiers, outcasts – mirror the child's "desperate feelings of loneliness and isolation" (Bettelheim 10). He says that the weddings that mark the end of many fairy tales illustrate "that which alone can take the sting out of the narrow limits of our time on this earth: forming a truly satisfying bond to another" (10-11). Cultural-materialist Jack Zipes observes, "If a Grimm protagonist . . . does not communicate with helpers, whether they be beasts, fairies, devils, giants, or hags, he or she is lost. The tales describe the need for communicative action that enables the protagonist . . . to conceive a more just realm" (Zipes, *Brothers* 81). Swiss formalist Max Lüthi went even farther, indicating, in *The European Folktale: Form and Nature* (1947), that if the protagonists of fairy tales are typically isolated, conversely, their isolation presents them with greater opportunities to join communities. If protagonists, initially, "are not linked by a vital relationship to any family, people, or other kind of community," or set the tale in motion by leaving what community they have in order to "go out into the wide world as isolated individuals" (Lüthi, *European* 38), the fairy-tale hero subsequently proves capable of establishing relationships with many different kinds of people. Two themes that Lüthi

identified in fairy tales, what he termed "isolation" and "universal interconnection," are linked, according to him. "It is not in spite of their isolation but because of it that folktale characters are capable of establishing contact with any other character. If they were bound by permanent human ties . . . they would not be free at any given time to establish the ties that are required by the situations in which they are placed" (54-55). According to Lüthi, fairy tales can be distinguished from other kinds of traditional stories by the degree to which this movement towards community is embedded in their structure.

Those few scholars who have acknowledged the influence of fairy tales on novels by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt have dismissed it as unimportant to an understanding of their work. For instance, Peter Conradi only allows that in Murdoch's novels, such narratives "are sometimes played with and made to help yield decoration for the plot" (Conradi 11). According to Conradi, Murdoch uses fairy tales to "contribute to . . . atmosphere" (126). He says that her use of myth is generally "deliberately incomplete, throw-away, and provisional"; it has "more the feeling of delighted play or joke than of any palpable symbolic design on the reader" (250). Other scholars have been vague in their interpretations of fairy-tale references in these works, as if the matter were undeserving of any closer examination. Mary Hurley Moran says that Drabble's references to other literature in her novels show that "[o]ur perceptions as well as our identities are shaped by a variety of forces, and the literature and myths of our cultures constitute one of these" (Moran 113). Similarly vague is Jane Campbell's observation that "Byatt has made her own combination of myths, symbols and allusions, but her method of doing so constitutes her own admission that no order of language can hold the chaos of experience" (Campbell 159). William Slaymaker says that, in Murdoch's

novels, "myths provide fictional frameworks to support her notion of the incomprehensibility and impenetrability of human action and motivations" (Slaymaker 19). Elizabeth Dipple says that allusions in Murdoch to mythology can result in "overplotted, tricksy" novels; where they work, she says, references to old stories can be seen "assisting the novel toward profound and unnerving ends." What ends, one might ask? Well, they are "religious in impact" (Dipple 3). These scholars do not acknowledge the important role played by fairy tales in the work of these three writers.

The use of fairy tales by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt is, in fact, central to an understanding of their fiction. Adult characters in their works repeatedly derive comfort and inspiration from the vision of the world that is presented in fairy tales, even in the notoriously violent German fairy tales of the Grimm brothers, which are my focus here. In Drabble's novel, *Jerusalem the Golden* (1967), Clara Maugham finds in her mother's house following her death a book of fables, and, flipping through them, is delighted by their relevance to her adult life: she experiences "the (pleasant) shock of finding the new contained and expressed in the framework and the terms of the old" (Drabble, *Jerusalem* 35). Repeatedly, Murdoch's novels show that she is interested in "[t]he way in which magic can be part of ordinary life" (Murdoch, *Flight* 192). In Drabble's *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963), even the pragmatic Louise Bennett, who marries for money and ends up unhappy, recognizes that "all those things like wicked stepmothers are true . . . . All the fairy-story things" (Drabble, *Summer* 195). Frederica Potter, escaping an abusive husband in Byatt's *Babel Tower* (1996), is not so damaged by her ordeal that she has stopped believing that "princes and princesses are what we all are in our minds" (Byatt, *Babel* 316). Australian writer Rodney Hall suggests in his novel, *The Second*

Bridegroom (1988), that "however important our history is to us our fairytales go deeper" (Hall 67). It is with equal seriousness that these writers approach the stories which other writers have consigned to the nursery.

Although references to fairy tales abound in modern fiction, most often, the characters in modern novels who take fairy tales seriously are children. In Australian novelist Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* (1991), fourteen-year-old Rose Pickles, who has to go down the street to the local tavern most evenings to collect her mother, tries to imagine her parent's abusive drunkenness as a plot device in a fairy tale, but finds that reality soon intrudes:

> Now and then Rose tried to see the whole business as hilarious; it was like being in the first chapter of a fairy tale about a sweet girl with a nasty but beautiful step-mother. But the pleasure wouldn't stay with her more than a moment or two. There was too much shame, too much cowering under the neighbours' eyes, too much agonizing embarrassment going to school with a black eye or a fat lip – no, it was too real. (Winton 142)

Barbara Hanrahan, another Australian writer, follows another young girl with big dreams to the same conclusion: in *The Frangipani Gardens* (1980), Lou sometimes imagines herself as a fairy-tale heroine, but the truth of her situation, her poverty and her mother's career as a prostitute, means that dreaming "wasn't something she could rely on . . . . reality had power" (Hanrahan 90). Canadian novelist Audrey Thomas uses the happily-ever-after unions of fairy tales with bitter irony in her stories about such dreaming young girls growing up to experience abusive, adulterous marriages. For example, in her story "Young Mothers," a child whose parents are facing divorce remembers their family life,

now shattered, as "a continuous fairy story" (Thomas 12). British novelist Graham Swift uses fairy tales in *Waterland* (1983) to blur the distinctions between storytelling and truth, a matter that grows more complicated for his child narrator, Tom Crick, as he leaves behind his childhood on the fens of northeastern England and becomes a teacher of history: maybe even "history was 'a fairy tale'" (Swift 6), he considers. In Indian novelist Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), the narrator treasures fairy tales as a child, imagining himself capable of the heroisms of 'Al al-Din, Ali Baba and Sindbad, but as a young man he sees so many people suffer as a result of his mistakes in relationships that he soon determines the tales comprise only "falseness, unrealities and lies" (Rushdie 389). In each case, a child accepts a fairy-tale vision of the real world, only to be forced to surrender it upon attaining adulthood. This is very different from how Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt use the tales, as a source of comfort and inspiration for men and women seeking meaning to their existence.

Although some writers of fiction portray their characters as leaving behind a fairy-tale vision of the world when they enter adulthood, we know that Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were writing for adults when they published their two-volume collection of German fairy tales, *Kinder und Hausmarchen*, in 1812 (vol. I) and 1815 (vol. II). This is in spite of the collection's title, translatable as "Children's and Household Tales." Perhaps it is natural to associate fairy tales with childhood, but it is a misconception that the Grimm brothers designed their tales as appealing fantasies for children. "In fact," writes folklorist Jack Zipes, "from the beginning their principal concern was to uncover the etymological and linguistic truths that bound the German people together and were expressed in their laws and customs" (Zipes, *Brothers* 10). By 1812, the Grimms had

already produced a German dictionary, a German grammar, and a book on ancient German law, among other scholarly, fact-based books and articles. They were known to other folklorists as "conscientious" researchers (Zipes, *Brothers* 10); as Zipes notes, they tried to make their version of the tales "as close to the oral tradition as possible" (12), although their editing process has fascinated folklorists. The Grimms were inspired in their work by nationalistic impulses, with the education of German children in the standards and expectations of their society a lesser aim. It was only as the popularity of the work among children and their guardians became evident, from about 1819 on, that editions were tailored more and more to appeal to a young audience.

Modern readers who associate fairy tales with childhood will be surprised by some of the narratives' depictions of terrible cruelty. Weddings in fairy tales are typically celebrated alongside the punishment of those who tried to prevent them, with villains rolled downhill in barrels of nails or obliged to dance themselves to death in red-hot shoes. Although all fairy-tale traditions involve violence to some degree, the Grimms' tales are notorious for their particularly bloody violence. It seems that this has made them more interesting for some audiences than the more courtly French tales of Charles Perrault, for instance, which were very popular in England when they were translated into English in 1729 (Opies 30). Italo Calvino has remarked on this aspect of the Grimms' tales in the Introduction to his edition of *Italian Folktales*, arguing that in Italian tales, "The continuous flow of blood that characterizes the Grimms' brutal tales is absent" (Calvino, *Intro.* xxix). The violence of the Grimms' tales has been their main point of interest for some writers. Canadian writer Margaret Atwood frequently draws on the Grimms' tales for their violence. In her novel *The Robber Bride* (1993), a character

remarks that there is no point to the tales if one edits out the violence – it is central to their philosophy that "[s]omebody had to be boiled" (Atwood, *Robber* 341). American writer Joyce Carol Oates also draws on the Grimms' fairy tales for their violence: "Once upon a time," begins the story "Haunted," which ends with the violent death of a child. British writer Angela Carter, in works such as her modern fairy-tale collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), has shown that she is fascinated by the violence of the Grimms' tales, along with their sexual suggestiveness. Maria Tatar has made a career out of the Grimms' violence: her books, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1987) and *Off With Their Heads! Fairy Tales and The Culture of Childhood* (1992), speculate on why the Grimms eliminated or toned down references to sexuality in later editions of the tales, while embellishing violent episodes.

The particularly bloody violence of the Grimms' fairy tales can be seen as serving a larger purpose: the tales suggest that violence is necessary in order for change to occur. One clear example of this occurs in the Grimms' familiar tale, "The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich," when a princess who reluctantly accepts a frog as a companion after he retrieves her ball from a well sees him transformed into a prince when she hurls him at the wall. Moreover, scholars taking a psychoanalytical approach to fairy tales defend their violence as integral to their healing power. In *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), Freudian child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim argues that the gruesome aspects of fairy tales figure as fantastic exaggerations of the reader's "formless, nameless anxieties, and his chaotic, angry, and even violent fantasies." Fairy tales permit the reader to "fit unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content." Bettelheim finds fault with "prettified and simplified" versions of fairy tales

that have been rewritten for modern audiences, arguing that they have lost much of their psychological impact along the way. He notes, "The dominant culture wishes to pretend . . . that the dark side of man does not exist," but "one-sided fare nourishes the mind only in a one-sided way, and real life is not all sunny." In earlier versions of the tales, even heroes and heroines might be guilty of terrible cruelty; in many versions of the Cinderella story, as we will see in Chapter Two, Cinderella brings the wickedness of her stepmother and stepsisters on herself when she kills her mother. But this bad behaviour on the part of fairy-tale protagonists serves to clarify, according to Bettelheim, the understanding that "much that goes wrong in life is due to our very own natures – the propensity of all men for acting aggressively, asocially, selfishly, out of anger and anxiety" (Bettelheim 7). The violence of some fairy tales, therefore, makes more accessible the guidance and reassurance that those narratives offer modern audiences.

The symbolic value of the violence in fairy tales – its connection with transformation and with the expression of nameless anxieties – explains why Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt most often refer to the Grimms' tales, rather than those of any other tale tradition, when they use fairy tales in their fiction. Their moral vision, which sees characters acknowledging in the course of a novel the importance of their connection to a community, typically requires significant personal change. In some cases, this borrowing from the Grimms is made explicit in their fiction, with the writer referring to a particular German tale. For instance, in Byatt's novel *Possession* (1990), nineteenth-century poet Christabel LaMotte writes a version of the Grimms' animal-bridegroom tale "Hans My Hedgehog." Elsewhere, it could be argued that Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt were inspired by the Grimms' versions of tales, simply because of the strength and

determination of their characters. For example, Liz Headleand, the protagonist of Drabble's trilogy consisting of *The Radiant Way* (1987), *A Natural Curiosity* (1989) and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991), is compared to Cinderella throughout the three novels. Many tale traditions feature a version of this well-known tale. However, Liz's fierce ambition, which has alienated her family and friends, is more reminiscent of the heroine of the German version of the tale, than the sweet-tempered Cinderella of Perrault's version, which inspired the saccharine animated Disney film.

The violence that is such a prominent feature of the Grimms' fairy tales also permits the introduction of an ambiguity into references to the tales in the works of these writers. One of the ways in which Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt can be usefully compared is in their use of irony. The works of the three writers are infused with irony, but it seems to inform in particular the endings of their novels, which are typically either open and unresolved, or Dickensian in the suddenness of their resolution of complex difficulties experienced by the characters. Peter Conradi's study, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist* (1986), emphasizes her ambivalence. Conradi says that Murdoch's combination of moral passion and skepticism generates "her brilliant and essentially tolerant double focus" (Conradi 64). The reader's attempt to discern clear patterns of morality in Murdoch's fiction is continuously frustrated by the author's rewarding of selfish characters. Sometimes it seems that happiness is reserved, in Murdoch's world, for characters of limited intelligence. Joanne Creighton's *Margaret Drabble* (1985) similarly focuses on the ambiguity that characterizes this fiction. Creighton suggests that Drabble's work "is most successful when it is questioning, equivocal, open to possibility rather than rhetorical or committed to a particular view" (Creighton, *Drabble* 16).

Drabble has discussed her unresolved endings, which have attracted a certain amount of critical attention, saying, "If I am a moral writer, it is not because I want to teach anybody anything. I have lots of questions" (Poland 264). Kathleen Kelly has written in *A.S. Byatt* (1996) about the ambiguity that one encounters everywhere in Byatt's fiction, particularly in her use of symbols: "Byatt's novels are often sites of controversy: she passionately uses description and allusion and metaphor as if they could capture some truth, while her plots are often open-ended and celebratory of the inability to do so" (Kelly xiii).

Such ambivalence is present in the way these writers use fairy tales, particularly in their application of those narratives to the experiences of female characters. Although the fiction of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt demonstrates that they are deeply interested in the complexities of women's lives in the modern world, and although they handle with particular sensitivity the trouble that female characters can get into by defining themselves as wives and mothers, all three writers have distanced themselves from feminism in interviews. Moreover, while they seem to take fairy tales seriously as offering ways of thinking about adult experiences, their fiction does not pose clear challenges to those narratives which have alienated many female scholars with their seeming prescriptions for appropriate female behaviour. For example, as we will see in Chapter Three, animal-bridegroom fairy tales inform Murdoch's novel *The Green Knight* (1993), in which various characters come to terms with their impression of the opposite sex as loathsome. But if some of the romantic unions that end the novel show questionable judgment, all of them serve to bring isolated characters into the community. As we will see in Chapter Two, references to "Cinderella" in Drabble's trilogy, *The*

Radiant Way (1987), *A Natural Curiosity* (1989) and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991), illuminate what psychiatrist Liz Headleand has lost in her ambitious pursuit of a career, but the failure of her two marriages and her alienation from her family do not quite take the shine off the significance of her achievement. In Byatt's *Possession* (1990), two female characters are compared to the Grimms' Briar Rose; one of them goes crazy and dies alone, while the other seems able to reconcile the conflicting demands of romance and career. In each case, the themes of the fairy tale being referenced are simultaneously interrogated and reinforced.

Women and fairy tales are intimately connected. Few of the writers that I mention in this project are men, and this is not because my reading habits favour female writers. It seems that women writing fiction are simply more interested than male authors in referencing fairy tales in their work. It is difficult to definitively answer the question of why this should be, although numerous explanations have been proposed by scholars. Maria Tatar suggests that women are interested in fairy tales because "the most celebrated characters in fairy tales are female" (Tatar, *Hard* 85). Although many tales end in marriage, she says, the bridegroom tends to be "a colourless figure," lacking "a history, a story, and even a name" (92), whereas "Cinderella, Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood, and Sleeping Beauty: these are the names that have left so vivid an imprint on childhood memories" (85). Ruth Bottigheimer points out that "narrators seem to favour heroic figures of their own sex" and that some of the Grimms' "most prolific" contributors of tales for their collection were women (Bottigheimer 10) – more support for the argument that the tales have a quality that women in particular appreciate. One hesitates to make the argument that women are generally more involved in child-raising

than men are, and therefore have a greater familiarity with what many think of as children's stories. Jack Zipes says that fairy tales are a female concern because the institutionalizing of the fairy tale began in the salons of seventeenth-century France and arose out of a need by aristocratic women to elaborate and conceive other alternatives in society than those proscribed for them by men (Zipes, *Myth* 23). Marina Warner says that fairy tales are "definitely girly" (Warner, *Beast* xiii), an impression that I think a lot of people have, but she does not speculate on why this is.

If women and fairy tales are linked, the way that females are depicted in the tales has been a source of grief for feminist scholars. "Few people look to fairy tales for models of humane, civilized behaviour," concludes Maria Tatar's *The Hard Facts of the Grimms Fairy Tales* (1987). Rather, she says, the stories "offer exaggerated visions of the grimmer realities and fantasies" in our lives (Tatar, *Hard* 192). Feminist readers have demonstrated that the treatment of women in fairy tales figures as one of their grimmest exaggerations. Some readers have focused on sexist attitudes informing the Grimms' tales themselves, as in Ruth Bottigheimer's study, *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys* (1987). According to Bottigheimer, the Grimms' tales outline "gender-specific and gender-appropriate behaviour" which includes "radically different moral expectations for girls" (Bottigheimer 168). Jack Zipes, in his eight books of criticism on fairy tales, has shown an interest in how sexism has informed revisions and reworkings of tales that were less objectionable before they were made into Disney films, and likely had even more to offer an intelligent audience in their original, oral versions, as folk tales. Other readers have focused on how gender bias has corrupted folklore criticism. For example, Tatar wonders why "everyone seems to agree on the wrong message" (Tatar, *Hard* 165) in

reading fairy tales such as "Bluebeard," in which the woman's comparatively minor transgression has attracted more critical attention than the obvious villainy of the male in the story. Similarly, Marina Warner says that interpretations of fairy tales have damaged the cause of feminists: thanks to Freudian readings of tales such as "Cinderella," she says, "[t]he bad mother has become an inevitable, even required ingredient in fantasy, and hatred of her a legitimate, applauded stratagem of psychic survival" (Warner, *Beast* 212). The fact that fairy tales offend and frighten many female readers is made clear by the existence of a collection, published by Routledge, of feminist fairy tales and feminist essays on fairy tales, called *Don't Bet on the Prince* (1986). The book's editor, Zipes, invited women writers to express "dissatisfaction with the dominant male discourse of traditional fairy tales and with those social values and institutions which have provided the framework for sexist prescriptions" (Zipes, Preface xi).

If Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt use fairy tales without challenging their assumptions as much as some readers might like, feminist critics have struggled to make sense of the way women are depicted in the fiction of all three of these writers. Drabble's first three novels have been read as showing women unable to free themselves from male demands; instead, the protagonists fall in love with childbirth and housework. If *The Millstone* (1965) is an exception, that novel shows a woman freeing herself by living like a man. Readers object to Jane Gray's being rescued by a man from her lonely life as a single mother in *The Waterfall* (1969), while others point out that her rescuer, her lover James, is "unreal and fantastic" (Rose, *Equivocal* 68) and thus unavailable to the rest of us. "I had difficulty not slamming *The Waterfall* on the floor," says Lynn Veach Sadler in her preface to *Margaret Drabble* (1986). "How any feminist could

appreciate *The Waterfall* will remain a mystery" (Sadler 131). The only woman in Drabble's next three novels who does not "accede to the male point of view," according to Ellen Cronan Rose, is Frances Wingate, an archaeologist who struggles with depression, and in Rose's view, "we cannot quite take her seriously" (Rose, *Equivocal* 124). Rose's book, *The Novels of Margaret Drabble* (1980), makes clear the difficulty of taking a feminist approach to Drabble's fiction. Her thesis is that the aspects of Drabble's protagonists that disappoint feminists are actually signs of psychological problems, that most of Drabble's characters are more than misguided; they are pathological, neurotic or even anorexic. But Rose seems to throw up her hands at the end of her book, when she says, "Depending on a woman's expectations and experience, she can read Drabble's novels, especially the recent ones, as radical feminist visions or as affirmations of traditional humanist values" (127). As if she were at a loss for words to express her disappointment in the author, Rose includes in her final chapter a reproduction of the *trompe l'oeil* image familiar to many readers which reveals a crone and a pretty girl at the same time, depending on how one looks at it.

Murdoch's readers have pointed out that she almost never portrays liberated women in her novels. When Byatt does so, they seem to be figures of fun. In Byatt's *Possession* (1990), English scholar Leonora Stern is a caricature of a feminist, "[s]ingle-minded and zealous" (Byatt, *Possession* 241), as the novel's somewhat more marriageable heroine, Maud Bailey, describes her. Leonora's academic career has been characterized by radical shifts in direction to suit the fashion of the time, taking her from "militant middle and later Lacanian phases" (337) to her present enjoyment of lesbianism, vegetarianism and yoga. Her critical essays are hilarious in their

preoccupation with female bodily emissions. Meanwhile, the women in Murdoch's novels seem willing to accept domination by the men in their lives, even when the men are villains or fools. All six of her first-person narrators are men, and Peter Conradi has pointed out "the warmth of her identification" (Conradi 29) with them, in spite of their poor treatment of women. Finding Murdoch's inhabiting of male perspectives and her reluctance to deal directly with women's experience "problematical, puzzling and irritating" (Johnson xi), Deborah Johnson attempts in her study, *Iris Murdoch* (1987), a feminist reading of the novels that emphasizes irony and the use of symbolism as indicative of authorial distance. That this necessitates some rather dubious interpretations is made clear by Johnson's own admission that she seeks "to understand some of the ways in which Iris Murdoch does explore and exploit her female creativity so as to question and even undermine the very assumptions which she appears to endorse" (xii). It seems that a feminist must read *against* Murdoch in order to make her work palatable.

If scholars have been disappointed by the way Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt depict women, no remedy is offered by interviews with the authors, where all three have distanced themselves from feminism. Drabble says that although many of her novels focus on "a specific section of women that I happen to know about, middle-class women with ambition, in other words," she does not consciously write about women "in general terms" (Creighton, Interview 25). She says, "When I'm writing I don't think of myself wholly as a woman . . . . I've tried to avoid writing as a woman because it does create its own narrowness" (Cooper-Clark 19). Similarly, Byatt said, "Of course I am a feminist. But I don't want to be required to write to a feminist programme, and I feel uneasy when

this seems to be asked of me. I am a bit too old to be a naturally political animal" (Miller). Asked whether she thinks of herself as a women's writer, she said: "I don't need that. I'm interested in women anyway. Literature has always been my way out, my escape from the limits of being female. I don't want to have to get back in" (Dusinberre 186). Murdoch has frustrated a few scholars with her remarks about men and women being essentially the same, except for the fact that men are more interesting. "I don't really see there is much difference between men and women" (Biles 119), she said; "I don't think it's a great leap. There's not much of a difference, really. One's just a human being" (Bellamy 133). She has been dismissive of "rubbish like 'black studies' and 'women's studies'" (Biles 119) and the way that they entitle certain groups to special consideration. Furthermore, she has admitted that she prefers to write about the experiences of male characters: "I'm not interested in women's problems as such" (Bellamy 133), she said, and "I'm not very much interested in the female predicament." Her reasoning is that "the ordinary human condition still seems to belong more to a man than to a woman," and she worries that concentrating on women in one's fiction is "a bit like writing with a character who is black, or something like that" (Biles 119).

Scholars have responded by praising the ambivalence of these writers' work; if they seem to say outrageous things, it is implied, their meaning has likely been misunderstood. "Murdoch's work is plagued by contradiction," says Elizabeth Dipple, "and her best fiction reflects it" (Dipple 5). Murdoch is even deliberately imperfect, suggests Peter Conradi: "The books are wounded so that their meanings can, as it were, leak back into life rather than create a hermetically sealed world" (Conradi 261). Reviews of Byatt's novels show professional readers struggling to sort through her

allegiances. Her novels are "hard to pin down" (Karlin 17). She is "full of ambivalence" (Hulbert), an anomaly within a genre (Spafford 22). Drabble scholars praise her for making their work difficult. Lynn Veach Sadler says that it is hard to "pin Drabble down" on any of her themes, including feminism, because she "floats atop" them (Sadler 120). If Drabble's female characters seem to be in love with childbirth, Nancy Hardin says, they "are a convincing mixture of opposites and are all the more human for being so" (Hardin 275). Ellen Cronan Rose detects a "terrifying challenge" in Drabble's "deep-seated ambivalence about feminism" (Rose, *Equivocal* 126), but she argues that it is all right because "most women are as ambivalent about feminism as Margaret Drabble" (128). Joanne Creighton agrees that the "unresolved, exploratory quality" of Drabble's novels exemplifies "the tension experienced by many contemporary women who are struggling to define themselves" (Creighton, *Drabble* 32).

Some critics of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt who are interested in their use of fairy tales have chosen to interpret the use of such narratives by these writers as postmodern, suggesting that they employ them to play with notions of fiction and fictiveness or to debate the writer's task. These writers' affiliations with realism and postmodernism describe yet another dimension of their work where ambiguity is at work. Fairy tales, written stories that originate in the older, oral storytelling genre of folk tales, are certainly well suited to postmodernist explorations. The shape of fairy tales has been the focus of formalist scholars such as Max Lüthi and Russian theorist Vladimir Propp, who wrote the influential *Morphology of the Folktale* (1958). In fairy tales, Lüthi argued, "reality and unreality, freedom and necessity, unite" – they are "an archetypal form of literature which helps lay the groundwork for all literature, for all art" (Lüthi,

Once 146).

Scholars taking a postmodernist approach to the use of fairy tales in the fiction of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt fairy tales tend to group the stories with other features of their writing that challenge the assumptions of realism, such as "Gothic setting" and mythology. While the works of all three writers are rich with references to mythology, biblical stories, Shakespeare's plays and nineteenth-century fiction, the number and complexity of references to fairy tales in each writer's work would seem to demand more focused attention. Elizabeth Dipple classifies fairy tales in Murdoch as "art objects" (Dipple 99), and then proceeds to focus her discussion on Murdoch's views of art. Scholars have also been vague about the meaning of this intertextuality. Deborah Johnson proposes that Murdoch uses fairy tales to talk about writing, although she is not certain to what end. She says that they might highlight the contrivance of Murdoch's fiction, something Johnson believes is also at work in Murdoch's unrealistic endings. Perhaps, she suggests, Murdoch's shifting between genres addresses the question of how to read (Johnson 106), or the interplay of genres might be meant to make her novels elusive to the reader (110). Or, references to fairy tales might serve as a distancing measure: Johnson suggests that her use of "such authorial devices as male narration, multiple and elaborate plot-structures, Gothic setting and mythological frameworks" allows Murdoch to write about "culturally induced female misery" with "a certain control and detachment . . . to protect both author and her readers against the intensity of feeling" (66). Ellen Cronan Rose makes a similar suggestion that Drabble refers to other literary works in her fiction in order to "achieve distance from herself" (Rose, *Equivocal* 36), so that her work might not be so personal, might instead "stand entirely separate

from her" (35).

These approaches highlight one more explanation for the appeal of fairy tales to Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt: those stories provide an opportunity for contemporary writers to introduce a strangeness into realistic narratives without compromising their realism. Although the three authors have associated themselves in essays and interviews with the beleaguered tradition of realism in the British novel, reviews of their work in newspapers and literary journals illuminate the difficulty readers have had in sorting out their loyalties. Reviewers who have decided that Murdoch is a realist complain that the novels "fail to imbue a sense of reality" (Simon 7) or that she has "left the real world behind" (Sinclair 1149). Her fiction is "set in a kind of Never Never Land even when it doesn't mean to be." Its uses of myth and fable "never seem to quite add up" (Shippey 20). Anatole Broyard is clearly surrendering when he says, "Iris Murdoch's books are so interesting in their diverse ways that I find it difficult to judge them as novels"; they represent "an unclassifiable pandemonium" (Broyard 3). One reviewer of a novel by Drabble regards with "foreboding" the author's entrance into the "arbitrary extremism of Iris Murdoch's later novels" (*TLS* 1969). Another objects to her happy endings where "everything falls into place too neatly" (Dickstein 5). Drabble is perceived to be in "false relation to the realistic novel . . . . She merely goes through the motions" (Donoghue 20). In Byatt's *Possession*, "networks of coincidence and connection too often seem forced," things "dovetail together too neatly" (Karlin 17). Her less realistic works are relegated to "a brave experiment" (Duchêne 395). Reviewers complain that her so-called 'self-conscious realism' is "both too self-conscious and not real enough" (Wood 15). Byatt is seemingly "full of ambivalence about fiction's status" (Hulbert 38).

If reviewers have struggled with these writers' apparently divided allegiances, "anomalies" should come as no surprise to the student of contemporary British fiction. It may be true, as Malcolm Bradbury suggests in *The Modern British Novel* (1993), that realism has always had "a peculiarly strong place" (Bradbury 89) in the English novel, a place that it maintains even now. However, many contemporary British novelists calling themselves realists are actually producing what Christopher Bigsby describes as "by no means an innocent realism" (Bigsby, "Middleground" 149) in which an awareness of alternatives to realism is signalled throughout a work by the introduction of elements that normally would have no place in realistic fiction. For instance, after giving a rather dry paper at a narratology conference, Gillian Perholt, the protagonist of Byatt's story, "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye," buys an antique bottle with a genie inside who emerges and makes love to her in her hotel room. But the introduction of these unrealistic elements, according to Bigsby, never poses a serious challenge to a work's emphasis on the centrality of narrative, the significance of character, and the logic of history. Hybrid forms are the result, where straightforward storytelling blurs into narrative experiment and back again, and well-realized characters surprise the reader by wandering from time to time into the realms of myth, fantasy, fable and fairy tale.

Bigsby locates this fiction in a "middle-ground" between tradition and experiment, inspired, no doubt, by David Lodge's influential *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (1969). Lodge imagined a "crossroads" in contemporary fiction where the long, well-travelled highway of British realism was intersecting suddenly with a route offering alternatives: historical novels in one direction, and pure fantasy in the other. He felt that some of the most interesting work was being written inside that crossroads,

capturing a moment when the writer hesitated before choosing a definite direction. When Lodge revised his essay some twenty years later in 1992, he argued that what he had called "crossover fiction" was becoming more and more prevalent, remarking on the "astonishing variety of styles on offer today, as if in an aesthetic supermarket" (Lodge, "Today" 37). In *A Vain Conceit* (1989), D.J. Taylor calls such obviously conflicted writers "fabulists," inspired in his turn, no doubt, by American Robert Scholes's influential study *The Fabulators* (1963). Scholes included Murdoch in his list of practitioners of "fabulation," writers who constantly dispense with realistic elements, drawing on fantasy and symbolism to create a kind of original myth. But Taylor makes it clear, as Bigsby does, that the introduction of fantastic elements does not mean a writer is turning his or her back on realism. Peter Conradi says that this is true of Murdoch, arguing, "Her best work is quiveringly real/unreal in its texture" (Conradi 6). Taylor says that, although there are "odd, mad interludes where reality and fantasy are inextricably combined" (Taylor, *Vain* 115), invariably authors like Murdoch afford reality the greater share; it can be argued that they are telling "a number of small lies in order to emphasize a large truth" (116). Fable, myth and illusion as they appear in the works of these contemporary novelists offer "magnifications of reality" (127), according to Taylor, rather than escape routes leading away from the tradition of realism.

As ambiguous as their use of fairy tales may be at times, the fact that Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt take those narratives seriously as offering ways of thinking about modern life signals an essential optimism in their work. The optimism that resides at the heart of fairy tales is one dimension of those narratives about which scholars taking very different approaches to fairy tales would seem to be in agreement. Cultural materialist

Jack Zipes argues in his introduction to *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* (1987) that the stories "provide hope that there is more to life than mastering the art of survival. Their 'once upon a time' keeps alive our utopian longing for a better world that can be created out of our dreams and actions" (Zipes, Intro. xxxi). Feminist Marina Warner expresses a grudging admiration for the optimism of fairy tales when, quoting Gillian Beer's *The Romance,* Warner says, "Like romance, to which fairy tales bear a strong affinity, they could 'remake the world in the image of desire.' That this is a blissful dream which need not be dismissed as totally foolish is central to the argument of this book" (Warner xii). Swiss formalist Max Lûthi famously argued that the magical transformations of human characters into beasts and vice-versa, like the numerous episodes involving disguise and the throwing off of disguises, illustrated the folk tale's preoccupation with "man's deliverance from an unauthentic existence and his commencement of a new one" (Lûthi, *Once* 138). These critics share the approach of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt to the Grimms' tales, which is to see them as articulating an encouraging view of humanity.

I believe that the movement towards community in the fiction of these three writers identifies them as optimistic. But it is important to note that Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt have stopped short of describing themselves in those terms in interviews. Drabble said, "I like fairly optimistic endings" (Cooper-Clark 20), but she acknowledged, "It's more honourable to accept the possibility of disaster than to be a facile optimist" (26). Murdoch said about the world in this century, "There's a kind of optimism which has gone" (Bellamy 130), but "I don't have a pessimistic temperament" (Bellamy 132). This is not to say that their novels depict an idealized world where nothing bad ever

happens – quite the contrary. "It is depressing to read about depression" (Drabble, *Realms* 152), Drabble's narrator says in *The Realms of Gold* (1975), as justification for terminating her description of a particularly dreary character – Janet Bird, an unfulfilled Romley housewife. Yet depression has been a central theme for all three writers. Accidental misfortune also abounds in their fiction. In Murdoch's *An Accidental Man* (1971), there are four violent deaths (one of a child), two attempted suicides, and characters suffering from severe learning disabilities, schizophrenia and brain damage. Drabble and Byatt show a greater concern than Murdoch with depicting social realities – Peter Conradi has noted that Murdoch "says little about work and often appears to take money for granted" (Conradi 4) – so that characters in their novels are given to despairing about the state of England; the happy ones among them could be defined as "a freak escape from the general doom" (Drabble, *Middle* 15), as Kate Armstrong's friend Hugo describes her in Drabble's *The Middle Ground* (1980). Sexual assaults on children are featured in each book of Byatt's Frederica Potter series, *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996), with Byatt admitting in an interview that the writings of de Sade influenced the third book (Miller). Murdoch and Drabble have each written one novel virtually bereft of optimism: Murdoch's *The Time of the Angels* (1966) describes the suicide of a defrocked priest following years of sexual abuse of his daughter, and Drabble's *The Ice Age* (1977) uses the phrase, "These are terrible times we live in" (Drabble, *Ice* 10), to introduce us to characters struggling under the economic collapse in Britain in the mid-1970s. But the way in which relationships are embraced in these novels suggests that their characters have not given up on the possibility of securing happiness in the modern world.

Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt are remarkable for presenting an encouraging view of humanity at a time when optimism in literature is fairly rare. Refusing to participate in what Julia Corbett, a novelist character in Byatt's novel *The Game* (1967), calls "the current fashionable hopelessness" in fiction (Byatt, *Game* 88), these three writers explore solutions to a range of human problems in their work, from conflicts between parents and children, to women's efforts to achieve autonomy inside marriage, to the difficulty of realizing one's potential personally and professionally amid the complexities of the modern world. Much of British fiction over the last fifty years or so has been produced in an atmosphere of negativity, under the assumption that we – and our counterparts in novels – exist in a nightmare world at the end of things. "You don't write about happiness" (Byatt, *Biographer's* 256), acknowledges Phineas Nanson, the jaded post-graduate student of literary theory who narrates Byatt's novel, *The Biographer's Tale* (2000). A year later, however, he experiences happiness and takes back what he said.

While other writers indulge in what Malcolm Bradbury calls in *The Modern British Novel* "a now routine Nineties diet: of apocalyptic cities, serial killers, gender wars . . . marital collapse, familial disintegration, child abuse, alien visitations, dark prospects and embittered shapeless lives" (Bradbury 458), Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt maintain that we still inhabit beauty and meaning, if only we might learn the habit of connecting with people in the right way. The vision of the world presented by fairy tales, where an individual's striving against incredible odds can bring happiness to an entire community, reinforces this argument in their fiction. In *After the War* (1993), D.J. Taylor takes up Bradbury's observation about the "routine Nineties diet" of writers of fiction to argue that it is an assumption of British novels since the 1950s, especially, that

the nation has declined and that her citizens have failed to rise above that circumstance. Bradbury sees British fiction darkening at the end of the nineteenth century, as a result of the weakening of religious faith under pressure from scientific discovery and Darwinism. Taylor blames the horrors of two world wars, and decade after decade of promised and unrealized social, political and economic reform in Britain since the 1950's. Unlike many contemporary British authors, Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt have made morality and concomitant human action a central focus of their work.

As I have indicated, it is not that the world depicted by these authors is a beautiful place. Rather, what sets them apart from their contemporaries is the determination of their protagonists to do something about the circumstances of their lives. These days, most characters in British novels are exhausted by living, and at a loss for alternatives, as a passage from Martin Amis's *The Information* (1995) illustrates. Amis's novel becomes most poetic as failed writer Richard Tull tries to articulate his sense of weariness:

> Richard Tull felt tired, and not just underslept. Local tiredness was up there above him – the kind of tiredness that sleep might lighten – but there was something else up there over and above it. And beneath it. That greater tiredness was not so local. It was the tiredness of time lived, with its days and days. It was the tiredness of gravity – gravity, which wants you down there in the centre of the earth. That greater tiredness was here to stay: and get heavier. (Amis 4)

Novels by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt share a feature of fairy tales identified by folklorist Jack Zipes: "The emphasis is on hope and action" in fairy tales (Zipes, *Breaking* 33), Zipes said, even if most protagonists are aware that they can only achieve "limited victories" (31) against the forces that oppress them. Characters in the fiction of

these writers who feel the lure of solitude must fight their inclination to withdraw like Amis's Richard Tull from the complexities of modern life into stasis and depression.

In novels by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt, responsibility concerns both our treatment of others and our honesty about ourselves, and moral behaviour is achieved through action as well as the power of the imagination. Murdoch said, "If you are writing novels, you can't avoid morality" (Bigsby, Interview 224). In her famous 1961 essay, "Against Dryness," she observes that, since the turn of the century, "We have suffered a general loss of concepts, the loss of a moral and political vocabulary .... We no longer see man against a background of values, of realities, which transcend him" (Murdoch, "Dryness" 17). In her view, even the modern writer "should be conscious of himself as a moralist" (Meyers 219). Writing about George Eliot, Byatt expresses similar regret that writers are no longer interested, as they were in the late nineteenth century, in morality as a form of human experience "that must be studied and valued as part of our natural history" (Byatt, "Eliot's" 92-93). Meanwhile, Drabble says that she writes novels to "find out about living and about the values of living" (Hardin 279). She is interested in exploring in her novels why "there are very few people who make the moral effort," why people "make wrong choices and then they don't fight back when they've made the wrong choices" (Cooper-Clark 26). American writer Joyce Carol Oates said in a review that Drabble has "taken upon herself the task, largely ignored today, of attempting the vital, energetic, mysterious recreation of a set of values by which human beings can live" Oates, Review 23). Drabble clearly shares the belief of one of her characters, poet Jane Gray in *The Waterfall* (1960), that "one can't have art without morality" (Drabble, *Waterfall* 232).

While action is central to these novels, even the willingness to conceive of a better life represents a kind of moral purpose for Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt. Each of them has depicted characters so gifted with imagination that they are open to having transcendent experiences. In Drabble's *The Realms of Gold* (1975), archaeologist Frances Wingate, whose imagination makes possible her discovery of the ancient city of Tizouk, has such an experience when she is stuck in a rut in a back road in Africa with her lover Karel. They discover a drainage ditch full of frogs, all different sizes, croaking in discord. "Oh, I love them, said Frances . . . . And every time she thought of them, in later years, she felt such pleasure and amusement deep within her, a deep source of it" (Drabble, *Realms*, 15-16). This "deep source" of joy sustains Frances in her struggles with depression. In Byatt's *Still Life* (1985), Marcus Potter, who in the earlier novel *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) suffered from hallucinations and out-of-body experiences, turns his extra-sensory talents into a career as a biologist: after examining an anthill with his class, "His mind swarmed with a dangerous yet lively pattern of repeating forms, as it had at moments he had earlier been tempted to define as the onset of madness." He realizes suddenly that there is "a God of overflowing order and intricacy, ovals and ants" (Byatt, *Still* 239), a conviction that motivates him afterward in his career. In Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), retired theatre director Charles Arrowby falls asleep in the yard of his beach house, thinking about all the relationships he has destroyed with his selfishness, and wakes up to witness a shower of falling stars. "How many of them there were, as if the heavens were crumbling at last and being dismantled. And I wanted to show all these things to my father" (Murdoch, *Sea* 145). It seems a mystical vision to Charles, who ends the novel reassessing the terms on which he relates to others. In

Chapter Six, we will look again at the importance of the imagination in these novels, and how "[e]ven the idea of joy or relief may carry one through" (Gullette 94) for characters seeking a way out of depression, mental illness and loneliness.

Scholars who focus on these writers' interest in fate are, I believe, placing too much emphasis on a point occasionally mentioned in their work. David Gordon argues that Murdoch's concern with motives of her characters is balanced by "the Murdochian truth that nothing matters very much on the level of personal choice" (Gordon 122-123). Murdoch has acknowledged, "Some sort of vision holds the world together, I think, and this is part of the subject matter of literature." But she describes this vision in human terms, calling it "forces of good that you suddenly can find, streams flowing toward you, whatever the metaphor would be" (Brans, Interview with Murdoch 190), with the implication that people are responsible for seeking out whatever grace is available to them. Mary Hurley Moran, in a study subtitled *Existing Within Structures*, finds that "Drabble's works suggest a deep emotional and philosophical attachment to the concepts of determinism and fatalism" (Moran 15). But Drabble has said of her work as a novelist, "I don't like events to dominate (characters) too much. I like a degree of self-control and self-propulsion" (Parker and Todd 170). She believes that "we certainly do live in a world of chance," but that the "duty of the human will is to seek to make sense of it and to resist being swamped by the arbitrary and saying because it's arbitrary there's nothing you can do. You have to endeavour in the face of the impossible" (Cooper-Clark, 26). Characters in these novels are restricted in their actions, to be sure, but they are less restricted by fate than by their obligations to one another. We will see additional examples of this in Chapter Two of this essay.

Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt articulate this notion of obligation to others in references throughout their fiction to a "web" or "network" of human effort. "Human frailty forms a system . . . and faults in the past have their endlessly spreading network of results" (Murdoch, *Nice* 198), suggests Willy Kost in Murdoch's *The Nice and the Good* (1968). In *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), this system is described as "a bad network" (Murdoch, *Philosopher's* 59). In Byatt's novel *The Game* (1967), characters detect a "beautiful network of designed movement" in the structure of the universe. Suffering and sin cause "rents in the network" (Byatt, *Game* 75). Byatt's interest in biology and history as forces which connect human beings permits her characters, like poet and naturalist Randolph Henry Ash in *Possession* (1990), to imagine "a continuity and interdependence of all life, which might perhaps assist in . . . doing away with the notion of individual death" (Byatt, *Possession* 271). In Byatt's latest novel, *The Biographer's Tale* (2000), she calls this continuity "conscience."[1] In Drabble's *The Radiant Way*, Liz Headleand's friend Alix, a social worker, "aspired to make connections . . . . Sometimes she had a sense that such interlockings were part of a vaster network, that there was a pattern, if only one could discern it." As she grows older, Alix increasingly questions the concept of the individual, seeing people instead as "intersections, threads, of a vast web, a vast network, which was humanity itself" (Drabble, *Radiant* 73). Drabble's characters, powerfully influenced by family ties and human frailties (two recurring themes in her work), discover that they must reassess their idea of freedom in light of a new awareness

[1] "They (the inhabitants of a fictional Utopia) look upon life at large, as probably a huge organization in which every separative (sic) living thing plays an unconscious part, much as the separate cells do in a living person . . . . It is a kind of grandiose personification of what we call conscience" (Byatt, *Biographer's* 225).

of their connections with other people.

This network of responsibility might even be seen as an alternative to religious faith, since organized religion has been more or less dismissed by these writers as an unlikely source of comfort and inspiration for modern people. Drabble says that her novels explore a kind of "salvation," and "the possibility of living, today, without faith, a religious life" (Drabble, "Author" 36). Murdoch suggests that "religion is in fact better off without God. It has to do with now, with every moment of one's life, how one thinks, what one is and does" (Meyers 220). The connection between religion and fairy tales highlights an intriguing dimension of those stories. Australian writer Peter Carey uses fairy tales to explore alternatives to religious faith in his novel, *The Unusual Life of Tristram Smith* (1994). The novel describes an imaginary country, Efica, where animal heroes from folktales take on a religious significance when the tradition develops that they were among the animals present at the birth of Christ. Fairy-tale commentator Jack Zipes suggests that the fairy tale reveals a "secular religious purpose" (Zipes, *Brothers* 83) in its emphasis on "social redemption" (84). The preoccupation of those narratives with mysterious forces acting on the human world no doubt furnishes some of the attraction they hold for writers such as Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt, who are concerned with how moral action links us with the larger community.

The connection between fairy tales and religion was perhaps best articulated by Swiss folklore scholar Max Lüthi. Lüthi's formalist essay *The European Folktale: Form and Nature* (1948) contrasted the structure of legends with that of what he called "folk tales" (not discriminating, as most scholars do now, between orally transmitted "folk tales" and their later, written development, "fairy tales"). Lüthi argued that while

characters in legends are generally apprehensive about the supernatural, the folk-tale hero's attractiveness to "otherworld" helpers (Cinderella's fairy godmother, for example, or in the Grimms' version of the tale, the birds roosting in a tree on her mother's grave, who help her win the prince) suggests that "invisible ties (link) him with the secret powers or mechanisms that shape the world and fate. Without his being aware of it, his behaviour is shaped by cogent laws" (Lüthi, *European* 57). Much like the characters in the fiction of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt, therefore, who sense they are enmeshed in a "web" or "framework" the limits of which and the purpose of which they can not quite grasp, protagonists in folk tales "do not know of the interrelationships of which they are part; they only let themselves be sustained by these interrelationships and thus they attain their goal." In their endeavours, "[t]here is much that makes itself felt without becoming visible" (59).

It is interesting that other contemporary writers have used fairy tales to illuminate discussions of faith, although in a different way from what Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt achieve in their description of a network of responsibility. Clearly, folklore and religion are intimately connected. We commonly describe some hope for the future as "like a fairy tale" in order to emphasize its distance from reality, the unlikelihood of its ever being the way we would wish. Disappointment is at the heart of the simile, and a number of modern novelists who demonstrate an interest in fairy tales have used them for this effect in their fiction. In novels by Graham Greene, for example, characters who have lost their faith in God compare religious faith to fairy tales. "You and I are much too old for fairy stories" (Greene, *Burnt-Out* 152), objects a witness to architect Querry's musings about his vanished faith in *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960). In *Our Man in Havana*

(1958), Wormold is mystified by his daughter's Catholicism, but he is "glad that she could still accept fairy stories" (Greene, *Havana* 72). In *The End of the Affair* (1951), Sarah says that religion is "a fairy-tale we tell each other for comfort" (Greene, *Affair* 110), although, after Sarah has died, one of her books of fairy tales given to a sick child seems to effect a miraculous cure. Rather differently, in Evelyn Waugh's novels, characters who have lost their faith in Britain associate the country's traditions with fairy tales, as in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), where the daughters at Brideshead are compared to fairy-tale heroines.[2] Jaded British officer Guy Crouchback, in *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955), compares men who no longer uphold the ideals of soldiership to the unsuccessful knights trapped in Sleeping Beauty's thorny pallisade (Waugh, *Officers* 257). Similar are the impressions of Nick Jenkins, the protagonist of Anthony Powell's twelve-volume series, *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1951-1975), when he sees that ancient forests about to be destroyed by a mining company bear a resemblance to British artist Arthur Rackham's illustrations of fairy tales (Powell 150). In each case, something far-reaching in which characters had once placed their faith – God or England – proves to have lost its power to reassure and motivate.

In her 1970 essay, "Existentialists and Mystics," Murdoch argued that fiction should take up the role that philosophy once had, of comforting and sustaining readers with images of human ability: "And if stories are told, virtue will be portrayed, even if the old philosophies have gone away" (Murdoch, "Existentialists" 181). If British fiction has become especially grim over the past fifty years, describing bleak landscapes

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[2] Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1945) 173, 296.

inhabited by the cruel and the disheartened, Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt provide magical alternatives for the reader. The fiction of these writers is distinctive in its presentation of an encouraging view of humanity. It has this characteristic in common with fairy tales. Darkness may be present in the fairy tale, but it has lifted by the time the story ends; enchantments have been broken and evil has been exposed and diminished, all as a result of the curiosity human beings show about each other, and their willingness to participate in the greater community. Kate Armstrong, the protagonist of Drabble's *The Middle Ground* (1980), a novel rich in allusions to fairy tales, says, "The world is changing, and all the nice friendly people will inherit it" (Drabble, *Middle* 261). If more than one scholar has found Kate's irrepressible cheerfulness hard to take, she expresses in plain terms a central view of these novelists. Inspired by fairy tales, characters in their stories show us how we might benefit from loving and comforting each other on the way to achieving our dreams.

SECTION ONE – FAMILIES

Chapter One

"Hansel and Gretel"

Childhood is not idealized in the works of Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt. Rather, the relationships that children have with their parents in this fiction serve to prepare them for the difficulties of adult entanglements. The Grimms' tale "Hansel and Gretel," which is frequently mentioned by these writers when they are describing the anxieties of child characters, usefully illustrates this theme. Disappointed in some way by their parents, children in these novels develop an apprehension about the isolation with which older characters in the fiction of these authors have such an ambivalent relationship. In a way, therefore, they anticipate the experiences of those characters, who feel the attractions of solitude but sense that they should break free of it to become a part of a community. Drabble said, "I suppose I tend to have used most frequently the model of parent-child relationships, because I think that obviously is where a lot of people learn to love; the child learns to love the parent and the parent learns to love the child." Drabble's emphasis on *learning* is significant, for as these novelists demonstrate, deep affection between parents and children does not always come naturally. But Drabble suggests that if one can learn "very close understanding" of a parent, "one can also learn to love one's fellow man" (Brans, Interview with Drabble 227). For these novelists, the relationships that children have with their parents can have a powerful – and often negative – effect on their engagements with others as adults.

In Byatt's novel *Still Life* (1985), Stephanie's son Will develops an attachment to

"Hansel and Gretel" after his mother is killed in a freak accident. In Byatt's *Babel Tower* (1996), Frederica's son Leo is similarly able to use this tale about children betrayed by adults as a way of reconciling himself not only to his near-abandonment by his mother, but to his estrangement from his father following his parents' divorce. Adult protagonists also find meaning in "Hansel and Gretel" in these novels. Young mothers in novels by Drabble, such as Jane Gray in *The Waterfall* (1969), must undergo a painful examination of the extent to which they resemble and differ from their children, and "Hansel and Gretel" helps them in this regard. What the tale suggests about the difficult theme of "murderous resentment" sometimes occurring between children and parents is illustrated by the experience of Frederica and her son Leo in Byatt's *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996). That the relationships children have with their parents dictate how they will behave with others as adults is made explicit in the somewhat surprising use of "Hansel and Gretel" by certain writers to describe a love affair rather than the trials of childhood. Murdoch uses the tale in this way in her novel *The Green Knight* (1993), in recounting teenager Harvey Blacket's efforts to free himself from his suffocating relationship with his mother in order that he might marry her friend Louise's daughter.

Childhood is often depicted by Drabble, Murdoch and Byatt as a terrible episode, resembling an illness or an infirmity from which one seeks the earliest possible recovery – although recovery is rarely complete. In Byatt's *Still Life* (1985), Daniel Orton, a minister whose experience of suffering has long since worn away his faith in God, sees in the children's ward of the local hospital the range of misfortunes to which children are vulnerable:

Mary in a pretty pink dress out of which stuck yellow claws and a head and face

> made by plastic surgeons of grafts ranging in colour from vellum to grape-purple. Mary, lashless, browless, lipless, hairless, except for a freshly-washed blonde tuft above her left ear. Mary had fallen or been pushed into an open fire, more than once. Mary never had visitors. Sometimes Mary went home, and came back with another scar or suppurating patch. (Byatt, *Still* 46)

The patients in the ward – some terribly burned, some missing limbs – are "bizarre manifestations of the random and the destructive" (47-48), hospitalized not only because of accidents, Daniel recognizes, but because of the malice of the parents and guardians who were supposed to love them. He worries about Mary's attachment to his pregnant wife, Stephanie, superstitious that close contact between them will somehow contaminate the child in the womb with Mary's misfortune: "Now, seeing Mary's shapelessness goblin-like straddling her thick hips he wanted her and his child out of there, as if they were vulnerable" (47). Daniel's anxieties seem unreasonable, but Byatt's novel confirms that "[b]etween Mary and the unborn child was a network" (46), that all children are in fact connected in their vulnerability to harm.

That childhood is an ordeal, and that parents are often to blame for this, is illustrated by the many children in these novels who require professional attention because of emotional problems. In Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974), Blaise Gavender's illegitimate son, eight-year-old Luca, has virtually stopped speaking, communicating mostly with gestures. His father has excluded Luca, along with the child's mother, from what he considers to be his real life at home with his unsuspecting wife. At the novel's end, Luca has to be committed to "a special institute for mentally disturbed children" (Murdoch, *Sacred* 344) after his witnessing a shooting

shuts him off from the world entirely. In Byatt's *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), the first novel in her Frederica Potter series that also includes *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996), Frederica's brother Marcus spends time in a mental hospital after a destructive relationship with his biology teacher, who betrayed Marcus as a stand-in for his bullying father when he exploited the boy's extra-sensory abilities. In Drabble's *A Natural Curiosity* (1989), Paul Whitmore's career as a serial killer, "The Horror of Harrow Road" who decapitates his victims, is connected with his mother's hatred of him when he was a child. Retired to the country to raise dogs, Angela Whitmore proves to be as ill-equipped to handle animals as she was to handle children; the dogs have to be destroyed after she abandons them to flee other criminal charges, as she had abandoned Paul and his father years earlier. Paul's terrible crimes are at least partially a result of what Margaret Morganroth Gullette has called "the almost obligatory crummy childhood" (Gullette 88) in Drabble's novels. "Unnatural, she was," Paul Whitmore's father remembers of his wife's resentment of her child. "Unnatural. I used to tell her, it's not right" (Drabble, *Natural* 136). But bad feeling between parents and children is not unusual in the novels of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt, as their use of the Grimms' tale "Hansel and Gretel" makes clear.

"Hansel and Gretel" is probably German in origin, although Iona and Peter Opie consider it "one of a series of tales," popular the world over, "in which small children outwit an ogre" (Opies 308), such as the 'Jack' tales, of which the English tale "Jack and the Beanstalk" is probably the best known. Perrault's "Le petit Poucet" (1697) and Madame d'Aulnoy's "Finette Cendron," published in English as "Finetta the Cinder-Girl" in 1721, bear some resemblance to the German tale, as does a Swedish tale where a

young captive of an ogre pokes an elder-twig out of his cage instead of his finger so that the ogre may test his fatness, the deception aided by the fact that the red sap resembles blood when the ogre tests the finger with a knife. "Hansel and Gretel" appeared in the first edition of the Grimms' *Kinder und Hausmarchen*, published in two volumes in 1812 and 1815, but according to the Opies, the fame the tale enjoys today is "undoubtedly" due to Humperdinck's children's opera, first produced in Munich in 1893, which modified the tale somewhat, omitting the significant feature of the parents' deliberate abandonment of their children in the forest.[3]

In the Grimms' story, Hansel and Gretel live "on the edge of a large forest" with their father, "a poor woodcutter," and their stepmother. When "a great famine devastated the entire country," so that there is not longer enough food for the whole family, the stepmother devises a plan, initially opposed by her husband, to abandon the children in the forest. Hansel and Gretel overhear the conversation, whereupon Hansel collects first white pebbles, then bread crumbs, with which he leaves a trail both times the parents try to return home from a wood-cutting expedition without their children. Birds eat the bread crumbs the second time around, so that Hansel and Gretel are finally unable to return home. After three days of wandering in the forest, the children are led by a beautiful white bird to "a little house that was made of bread," with cake for a roof and sugar windows. Nibbling at the house, the children alert the witch who lives there, who has designed her house as a lure for the children she feeds on. Initially she is kind to Hansel and Gretel, feeding them and putting them to bed, but when morning comes she

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[3] Much of the information in this paragraph is taken from Iona and Peter Opie's *The Classic Fairy Tales*, 308-311.

promptly throws Hansel into a pen in the yard, and announces her intention to fatten him up and eat him. Gretel is forced to do housework. From time to time the witch tests Hansel's readiness by insisting he put a finger through the bars of his pen so she can feel how plump it is. By sticking out a little bone instead, Hansel delays his fate by a month, but finally the witch becomes impatient and decides to eat him regardless. Instructed to check the heat of the oven, Gretel pretends she does not know how and tricks the witch into sticking her own head in, whereupon the girl pushes her in and bolts the door, incinerating the witch. The children ransack the house for the witch's treasure and return home, aided by a duck who carries them across a river. Their father, who "had not had a single happy hour since he abandoned his children," is relieved to see them, and – the stepmother who caused so much trouble having, in the meantime, died – the children and their father "lived together in utmost joy."[4]

Contemporary responses to "Hansel and Gretel" illuminate the fundamental differences between Jungian and Freudian fairy-tale scholars on the one hand, who value what the tales suggest about a "collective unconscious" or emotional problems that they believe have always been a feature of human existence, and materialists, historians, feminists, structuralists, and others, who tend to focus more on the tales themselves, or on the place and time from which they emerged. Regarding "Hansel and Gretel," Freudian Bruno Bettelheim argues that the children's cruel eviction from their home symbolically illustrates "the child's striving to hold on to his parents even though the

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[4] Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. Jack Zipes (London: Bantam, 1987). All quotations from the Grimms' fairy tales in this essay are taken from this volume.

time has come for meeting the world on his own" (Bettelheim 15). But Jack Zipes, a cultural materialist focusing on what fairy tales can tell us about the society which produced them, has expressed concerns about the apparent willingness with which folklorists using psychoanalytical approaches dismiss the widespread abuse of children in fairy tales. He says, "Instead of interpreting the tale as one of projected inversion, as Freud always did in cases of hysterical women, and most analysts following him, we might want to try to locate the truth of the tale's trauma in actual experience" (Zipes, *Brothers* 125). Zipes has identified approximately twenty-five Grimms' tales "in which the main focus is on children who experience some form of abuse" (120). Whatever symbolic meaning one might derive from this, Zipes argues, stories such as "Hansel and Gretel" also describe a very real struggle for survival among the peasant class at the end of the eighteenth century. "The wars of this period often brought with them widespread famine and poverty," he notes, which forced people to "go to extremes" to survive, and abandoning children who could not be fed might have been one such extreme (Zipes, *Breaking* 32).

Maria Tatar offers a means of reconciling these disparate viewpoints. In her two books about the Grimms' fairy tales, Tatar synthesizes different approaches to the tales, drawing upon Jungian and Freudian readings, among others. Although the name of the Grimms' collection, *Kinder und Hausmarchen* (Children's and Household Tales), suggests that it was aimed at a young audience, the brothers were apparently surprised by the popularity of their tales among children, and were motivated to change subsequent editions to make the stories more appealing to young readers. Despite their editing, however, the Grimms' tales remain undeniably adult in some ways. As Tatar introduces

her book, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms Fairy Tales* (1987), "For many adults, reading through an unexpurgated edition of the Grimms' collection of tales can be an eye-opening experience," finding readers unprepared for "the graphic descriptions of murder, mutilation, cannibalism, infanticide, and incest that fill the pages of these bedtime stories for children" (Tatar, *Hard* 3). The tale of "Hansel and Gretel" is among the more disturbing tales, focusing as it does on the abandonment of children by their parents. Maria Tatar points out that even if the father in the tale loves his children, and seems a reluctant party to his wife's abandonment of them in the forest, his love "lacks the passion necessary to resist the strength of his wife's resolve." Moreover, "[e]ven when a tale half-heartedly exonerates one or both parents of malice," the fact remains that the children have been "left to fend for themselves because parents have been too incapacitated to provide. One way or another, the parents are to blame and begin to emerge at the least as monsters of negligence" (Tatar, *Off* 195). Cast off by their parents, the only adult the children can discover to fill their place is a witch who wants to eat them.

Tatar agrees with Zipes that "Hansel and Gretel" depicts a disturbing social reality. "That famine plays a prominent role in fairy tales comes as no surprise when we consider the chronic food shortages and periods of scarcity that afflicted those who shaped these stories" (Tatar, *Off* 192), she says. But Tatar does not believe that social problems affecting the peasant class at the time of the tales' creation can fully account for the misfortunes plaguing their younger protagonists. She observes, "even in cultures where child abandonment is supposedly rare or unknown, the theme of children deserted at birth figures prominently in folkloric traditions" (Tatar, *Hard* 60), and she therefore

speculates that those sequences have a symbolic dimension as well. If the children in "Hansel and Gretel" are sacrificed "in part to insure their parents' survival," Tatar says, details of the tale encourage us to believe they are evicted from the family "in part out of murderous resentment" (Tatar, *Off* 195).

The stepmother's characterization in the story certainly invites readers to conclude that she harbours resentment. She comes up with the scheme of abandoning the children in the forest, approaching this not as a necessary evil, given the failure of the family to provide for itself, but as a way that she and her husband can "be rid of them." She uses abusive language towards her children, calling them "lazybones" and calling Hansel "fool," and snarling at them when she gives them a piece of bread for their lunch, "you're not getting anything else." Interestingly, the witch later calls Gretel "lazybones." Jack Zipes has observed similarities in "Hansel and Gretel" between the stepmother and the witch, inviting the interpretation that they represent dimensions of one unreliable parent. Following Freud's use of id, ego and superego, it is an assumption of psychoanalytical approaches to fairy tales that characters in the stories represent "disparate and confusing aspects of the child's experience," as Bettelheim puts it, projected onto different figures (Bettelheim 75). Complex personalities such as the mother who loves but resents her child are commonly split in fairy tales, as in "Cinderella" which features a wicked stepmother "who may be hated without guilt," and a fairy-godmother, "who may be loved without reservation" (Pace 255). Just as the stepmother, who is supposed to nurture the children, abandons them in the forest, the witch initially presents herself as nurturing:

> Hansel and Gretel were so tremendously frightened . . . . But the old woman

wagged her head and said, "Well now, dear children, who brought you here? Just come inside and stay with me. Nobody's going to harm you."

She took them both by the hand and led them into her house. There she served them a good meal of milk and pancakes with sugar and apples and nuts. Afterward, she made up two little beds with white sheets, whereupon Hansel and Gretel lay down in them and thought they were in heaven.

When the witch asks the children, "Who brought you here?" she already knows the answer: it is the stepmother's engineering which has driven the children towards this, her more obviously evil double.

The "murderous impulses" between parents and children which Maria Tatar identifies in "Hansel and Gretel," and which are commonplace in myth and legend, are made evident by the central role of consumption in the tale. "The degree to which orality conditions and shapes the world of folktales is at first sight astonishing," says Tatar (Tatar, *Off* 205). In this tale, for instance, the family does not have enough to eat, the birds eat Hansel's bread-crumb trail, the children feed on the witch's edible house, she gives them a meal and she tries to eat Hansel. Jack Zipes argues that nourishment is "a crucial metaphorical aspect" of "Hansel and Gretel." He says, "Spiritually, psychologically, and physically, the children are deprived of nourishment" (Zipes, *Happily* 49). Tatar agrees that hunger in the tale is also symbolic, that "the fear of being devoured can be traced to anxieties rooted in the reality of aggressive parental behaviour or to guilty fantasies projected onto mothers and fathers" (Tatar, *Off* 205).

But parents are not the only consumers in tales where hunger is a theme. If "Hansel and Gretel" shows children victimized by adults, the tale also identifies children

as potential predators. That children are capable of diminishing and destroying their parents is a theme picked up by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt, troubling their sometimes sunny depictions of motherhood. (Some critics, for example, have been disturbed by the way pregnancy is celebrated as a female achievement in Drabble's early novels, where, as Elaine Showalter said, "a room of one's own is usually a place to have a baby."[5]) Bettelheim suggests a useful interpretation of the candy house in "Hansel and Gretel," arguing that if one thinks of it as a body, the children display the same cannibalistic tendencies as the witch who lives there. Certainly, the Grimms' text emphasizes the children's hunger, devoting several detailed paragraphs to their enjoyment of the candy house:

> 'What a blessed meal!' said Hansel. 'Let's have a taste. I want to eat a piece of the roof. Gretel, you can have some of the window, since it's sweet.'
>
> Hansel reached up high and broke off a piece of the roof to see how it tasted, and Gretel leaned against the windowpanes and nibbled on them. Then they heard a shrill voice cry out from inside:
>
> 'Nibble, nibble, I hear a mouse.
> Who's that nibbling at my house?'
> The children answered:
> 'The wind, the wind; it's very mild,
> blowing like the Heavenly Child.'

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[5] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977), 306.

> And they did not bother to stop eating or let themselves be distracted. Since the roof tasted so good, Hansel ripped off a large piece and pulled it down, while Gretel pushed out a round piece of the windowpane, sat down and ate it with great relish.

Not even the witch's voice calling from inside can slow the children in their meal, which is depicted as an assault on her home. Their enthusiastic destruction of the roof and windows has led some fairy-tale scholars to argue that the tale offers a lesson about greed and its ill effects. Bettelheim suggests that the cannibalistic tendencies on the part of the children, as evidenced by their consumption of the house, are reinforced by Gretel's pushing the witch into the oven (Bettelheim 162).

That parents can feel victimized by their children is illustrated by the experience of Frederica Potter in the second and third books of Byatt's series featuring that character, *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996). As an adolescent, Frederica sees that her mother, Winnifred, a housewife, has been "thinned-down by a lifetime of self-effacement and subordination" (Byatt, *Still* 58) to husband and children, and determines that this will never happen to herself. After all, Frederica considers, she is one of the "flaming" Potters, "ferocious" and "fuming" like her father, Bill, and not "the other sort – the sort that stops and suffers" (59). Little does Frederica suspect that Winnifred's suppressed rage makes her mother feel "as though she were boiling, an old witch in agony on her pyre" (178), suggesting a connection with the witch in "Hansel and Gretel." When Frederica is accepted at Cambridge, she believes this will permit her to "get right away" (26). Years later, however, *Babel Tower* finds Frederica in a similar situation to that of her mother, suffering in a bad marriage. Frederica recognizes the similarity: "I

always resented my own mother's passive quietness," she thinks. "It was not a life. It was what I do not what. It is what I have got" (Byatt, *Babel* 127).

Although she loves her young son Leo, Frederica acknowledges that "he has ruined her life" (Byatt, *Babel* 35). As they do for Murdoch and Drabble, fairy tales offer a way for Byatt to address the suffering women endure in being forced to make choices between motherhood and other obligations, such as those of a career. Finally fleeing her abusive husband after a violent quarrel, Frederica struggles to make a new life for herself and her son in London, but feels as if she is being consumed by her obligations. She has a teaching job and part-time work as a proofreader at a publishing house, but Leo takes up most of her energy:

> As the divorce hearing approaches, Frederica grows thinner and sharper. She is obsessed by the fear of losing Leo, a person who makes her life difficult at every turn, who appears sometimes to be *eating* her life and drinking her life-blood, a person who fits into no pattern of social behaviour or ordering of thought that she would ever have chosen for herself freely – and yet, the one creature to whose movements of body and emotions all her own nerves, all her own antennae, are fine-tuned, the person whose approach along a pavement, stamping angrily, running eagerly, lifts her heart, the person whose smile fills her with warmth like a solid and gleaming fire, the person whose sleeping face moves her to tears, to catch the imperceptible air of whose sleeping breath she will crouch, breathless herself, for timeless moments in the half-dark. (476)

Like her mother, "thinned-down" by familial obligations, Frederica experiences parenting as a loss of substance, as taking away from herself somehow, so that she "grows thinner"

under pressure from a kind of spiritual cannibalism on the part of her child. Naturally, part of her resents Leo for this, and another part of her feels guilty for resenting him, in the course of "a love so violent that it is almost its opposite" (234). The ambivalence about motherhood that Byatt often expresses through her female characters could not be made more evident.

Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt suggest that fairy tales might outline ways of thinking about adult problems. British novelist Muriel Spark's *A Far Cry From Kensington* (1988) similarly addresses the question of whom fairy tales are meant for. In the novel, Mrs. Hawkins, a secretary at a publishing house, is surprised to learn that her much younger lover, William, does not know any nursery rhymes or fairy tales. Born to the "sub-poor" in London, William escaped that world through scholarships and bursaries. But although he is now "a cultivated man" who can quote Schopenhauer, read Sophocles in Greek and analyse the music of Bartok, William's lack of familiarity with the stories that Mrs. Hawkins associates with childhood makes his origins clear. Mrs. Hawkins considers, "I had never before realized how the very poor people of the cities had inevitably been deprived of their own simple folklore of childhood." When they are in bed together at night, she tells William nursery rhymes and fairy tales, hoping to give him back the childhood he has lost. Along the way, fairy tales take on a different meaning for her than they had originally: "They were part of our love affair," she reflects (Spark 178). Sparks's novel shows that although fairy tales have been associated with the nursery, adults might find comfort and guidance in their themes, a notion shared by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt. Byatt has said that reading fairy tales as a child prepared her for adult life. She says, "They made it clear there was another world beside the world

of having to be a child in a house, an inner world and a vast outer world with large implications – good and evil, angels and demons, fate and love and terror and beauty" (Fraser 128). In their use of the Grimms' tale "Hansel and Gretel," these writers acknowledge that folklore could provide as much comfort to parents as it does to children in need.

Obviously, Frederica's resentment and guilt will also be hard on her son Leo, the object of those feelings, permitting references in Byatt's novel to "Hansel and Gretel" that illuminate the child's point of view as well. When Frederica leaves her husband, Nigel Reiver, the wealthy son of a shipping magnate who has brought her to live in his family's moated country house, she plans originally to leave Leo behind. At his father's house, Leo has a pony and the love of two doting aunts and an apple-cheeked housekeeper, and Frederica decides that it would be wrong to deprive him of those benefits in order to make herself happy. Perhaps that is not the whole explanation for her leaving him behind – this "ferocious" woman whose dreams of becoming a writer have been extinguished by obligations to her new family. But Leo suspects her plan, and ambushes his mother in the orchard that night as she makes her escape, insisting she take him with her. The trees looming over them in the darkness, and Leo in his pyjamas and bare feet, clinging and howling about abandonment, are reminiscent of the Grimms' tale. Frederica knows this will always be "the worst moment of my life," trying to free herself from a child who is gripping her as if he would "burrow back into her body" (Byatt, *Babel* 129). She realizes, "Both of us know I meant to leave him . . . this will be between us" (130). It is no surprise that after Frederica and Leo establish themselves in an apartment in London, "Hansel and Gretel" takes on a special meaning for the now

fatherless child, as it did for Daniel's son Will. "The good thing about Hansel and Gretel was that there were two of them, I think," Leo tells his mother, who must be his whole family now. "They were all right because they were two" (370).

It is strange that a story about children abandoned by their parents to die should serve as a source of comfort to children in these novels. However, according to Freudian Bruno Bettelheim, the gruesome aspects of fairy tales figure as fantastic exaggerations of the child reader's "formless, nameless anxieties, and his chaotic, angry, and even violent fantasies." Fairy tales provide the reader with a safe environment in which to "fit unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content" (Bettelheim 7). That the violence in fairy tales enables children to work through anxieties they can not discuss in the real world explains Roz Andrews's discovery in Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* (1993) that the grisly parts of fairy tales appeal to children, even if they make the adult reader nervous. Roz's twin daughters are disgusted when she suggests politically correct changes to "The Three Little Pigs," proposing that "maybe the pigs and the wolf could forget about the boiling water and make friends." She learns to her dismay that her "bloodthirsty" daughters cherish "all the pecked-out eyes and cooked bodies and hanged corpses and red-hot nails" (Atwood, *Robber* 341).

The story of "Hansel and Gretel" similarly provides comfort in a time of need for Will, the son of Frederica's sister Stephanie, in Byatt's novel *Still Life* (1985). When Stephanie is killed in a freak accident (electrocuted while crawling under her refrigerator to rescue a bird that has flown into the house), her husband Daniel is left responsible for Will and for Will's baby sister, Mary. Stephanie's father Bill had refused to indulge his

children in fantasies about Santa Claus, maintaining that "ascertainable historical truth was a freedom" (Byatt, *Still* 45). As a result, Stephanie and Frederica and their younger brother Marcus had grown up "frustrated of magic" (43), something that they still resent as adults. Daniel, also a pragmatist, takes a similar approach with Will, telling him the truth about his mother's death "concisely and exactly without preamble" (407-408), and taking him to the funeral, in spite of his grandmother's protests, so that Will "should not be confused, should know his mother was dead" (411). Daniel is therefore surprised to discover that a fairy tale might provide some comfort to a child so suddenly bereft:

> (Daniel) read *Hansel and Gretel*, over and over, ignoring, because he was beyond comforting, Will's reiterated assertions that Hansel and Gretel had been all right though their Daddy and Mummy had left them in a wild wood, to a witch who tried to eat them, they had got away, and gone home, and it had been all right, they had been all right, hadn't they. Daddy, *hadn't they*? (421)

So shaken by misfortune that he can no longer believe in any higher power besides "wild blows of chance" (10), Daniel is mystified that Will is able to "defend himself against the foul and corrupt nature of the face of things with the gruesome Grimm stories, in which the young and the hopeful returned, always returned, from castle and cavern, with the gold ring." The violence of the stories "revolted and perturbed" (422) Daniel, reminding him too powerfully of the violence that had taken his wife away from him. But for Will, "Hansel and Gretel" provides necessary reassurance when circumstances force him to confront his separateness from his mother earlier than would have been best for him.

The anxiety which accompanies separation of parent from child under more commonplace circumstances than a parent's death is detailed throughout works by Byatt

and Drabble, also illuminated by references to "Hansel and Gretel." Taking Leo to school for the first time, Frederica is excited for him, "But she does not know how Leo will survive group life. In the tiled corridors the shrill voices echo and bay. Frederica was a child pushed aside by, hunted by, other children. A solitary, angry child. Does this hand on?" (Byatt, *Babel* 371). Here it is the parent who must discover her separateness from the child, and not the other way around. Frederica worries that her son will suffer because of what he has in common with her. Young mothers in novels by Drabble must undergo the same painful examination of the extent to which they resemble and differ from their children, and "Hansel and Gretel" is useful to them in this regard. Jane Gray, the protagonist of Drabble's novel *The Waterfall* (1969), is left to raise her young son Laurie and her baby daughter Bianca by herself when her husband walks out on her after a violent fight. Jane, a poet, is a solitary person by nature, social situations typically filling her with anxiety, and she worries that her children will inherit this trait or learn it from her. She tries to make friends with other mothers so that Laurie can play with their children, but finds herself struggling "to break the fatal hereditary chain" (Drabble, *Waterfall* 137). It is for this reason that Jane is so moved, in a novel rich with references to fairy tales, by the story of "Hansel and Gretel," and by the sight of children alone, which reminds her of the tale:

> Tenderness between brothers and sisters always touched her . . . . she thought too of a brother and sister she had seen on a bus, a largish eight-year-old boy, in charge of a two-year-old girl, whom he had held firmly clasped on his inadequate lap, grappling with her as the bus swayed around the corners, talking to her all the time, telling her not to be afraid, they were nearly there, not to cry . . . proud of

her, loving her, with her huge wide streaky cheeks, her baby face, his own, his own sister. Hansel and Gretel, the Babes in the Wood. (82)

Afraid that she may be dooming her son, by example, to the same isolation that characterizes her own life, Jane worries, "oh God, all his life he'll suffer for me" (138). As it turns out, Laurie is as well-adjusted as most children, and does not have much of an interest in fairy tales anyway: "He preferred cartoons" (198).

Murdoch's novel *The Green Knight* (1993) draws on "Hansel and Gretel" to illustrate a stage in a person's development when they must separate from parents and take action to establish a life of their own. Freudian scholars typically approach fairy tales as describing stages in the necessary process of maturation. Bruno Bettelheim suggests that the opening sequence of many fairy tales which sees a child or a young person being cast out or deserted by the parents symbolizes the child's anxiety about independence (Bettelheim 98). Although it may seem like cruelty, it precipitates a course of personal development that is necessary to the child's future happiness:

> The fairy tale begins with the hero at the mercy of those who think little of him and his abilities, who mistreat him and even threaten his life . . . . At the tale's end the hero has mastered all trials and despite them remained true to himself, or in successfully undergoing them has achieved his true selfhood. He has become an autocrat in the best sense of the word – a self-ruler, a truly autonomous person, not a person who rules over others. In fairy tales, unlike myths, victory is not over others but over oneself and over villainy (mainly one's own). (127-128)

Becoming king in a fairy tale, Bettelheim proposes, represents that one has "become master of his fate" (78). Gaining the kingdom "is tantamount to having reached moral

and sexual maturity" (129). These happy endings are only attained through a painful process of self-discovery, which Hansel and Gretel initially resist. Ejected by their parents, they devise and carry out plans to return them to the house again and again, until finally forced into their confrontation with the witch. Bettelheim sees the tale illuminating the fact that, "[i]f we try to escape separation anxiety and death anxiety by desperately keeping our grasp on our parents, we will only be cruelly forced out, like Hansel and Gretel" (11).

Murdoch's use of the tale in *The Green Knight* challenges Bettelheim's thesis that if a person does not take this development on themselves, they will be forced to do so, as the children in the Grimms' tale are; rather, the novel proposes that significant change in our lives is only possible when we are ready for it. One would not expect "Hansel and Gretel" to have much relevance in the life of Harvey Blacket, age eighteen, but Harvey is locked "in a tempestuous, mutually possessive relationship with his mother" (Murdoch, *Green* 3) which has continued along those lines for much longer than it should have. Harvey's broken ankle, in a cast for the better part of the novel, serves to illustrate his inability to move forward in his life – and hence, away from his mother – and it is significant that the injury is due to a childish stunt (Harvey's accepting a dare to walk the parapet of a bridge, and subsequently falling and hurting himself). Harvey's immaturity is further brought into focus by the comparative maturity of the three daughters of Louise Anderson, his mother's friend. Harvey is in love with one of the daughters, although she is not the one he ends up with by the novel's end, so it is just as well that he is too frightened of sex at the start of the novel to do anything about his feelings but gaze at her longingly.

It is surprising that Harvey is so immature for his age, given that his mother more or less abandoned him during his early adolescence, "fleeing" to Paris and leaving her son an apartment and "various self-appointed 'foster parents,' of whom Louise was one" (Murdoch, *Green* 3). It seems that Harvey has resisted the opportunities – if one could so describe them – which life has provide him with for catapulting into adulthood. Harvey's father was never a part of his life. Altogether, there is a remarkable absence of fathers in the novel, which reflects a tendency of fairy tales in general, and a theme of "Hansel and Gretel" in particular, where the father is helpless to resist his wife's evil plan. Louise's husband died of cancer, Joan's husband disappeared and is presumed dead, Joan's own father was killed in a railway accident, Louise's friend Bellamy's father died in an accident when Bellamy was thirty, and the father of Lucas and Clement, other family friends, ran off with his mistress. Harvey has confided in Louise about "the terrible unhappiness of his early childhood" (6). He is only sort of joking when he tells one of her daughters, "my father and my mother both ran away. I was left abandoned in the forest . . . . and I know I shall never be happy as I once was" (11). Yet despite his occasional bouts of resentment, Harvey retains an almost incestuous attachment to his mother, as she does to him.

Harvey's mother, Joan Blacket, was "a bad girl" at school whose "lawlessness" made her attractive to Louise, herself "a good girl" at the same school (Murdoch, *Green* 1). Harvey calls his mother a witch (49). Their friend Tessa also uses that term for her (59), and to the reader, Joan certainly resembles a witch, if a sexy one:

> She had evidently powdered her nose, her pretty so faintly retrousse nose, making it look curiously pale, but had not yet donned the glowing mask of makeup which

so magically composed her face. Her long slim hand emerged from the fleecy sleeve and adjusted her dark red locks which were snakily straying upon the pillow. Her eyelashes, not yet darkened, fluttered, her eyes, narrowed, sparkled. (48-49)

Her snaky red hair, magic makeup, and narrowed eyes prompt Harvey to see his mother as a witch, as Joan's taunting Harvey into worrying about supporting her suggests a resemblance to the stepmother in the Grimms' tale, when all along she's carrying on a secret long-distance relationship with a Texas oil millionaire which will end in marriage at the novel's conclusion. Harvey thinks that his mother is serious when she threatens that she will starve without him, that there is a "background of a reality in which he was expected to play a heroic part . . . he was being handed a terrible new burden of responsibility" (50). "I'm an orphan," Harvey becomes aware. "I realize it for the first time" (59). He suspects that in his mother's life, he is "in a gradual process of being forgotten" (60), as if "he were being squeezed out of the world" (323). He concludes, "I have to go through some sort of ordeal before I am worthy" (111).

This life-changing "ordeal" would seem to be sex with Louise's middle daughter, Sefton, although Harvey enjoys what he had previously dreaded, and feels afterward "as if I were living in a myth" (Murdoch, *Green* 389). Transformation is a central theme in Murdoch's novel, as we will see when we examine *The Green Knight* again in Chapter Three. At the beginning of the novel, many characters were lonely and isolated, but *The Green Knight* ends with a flurry of marriages. The suddenness of many of the unions may cast doubt on the likelihood of their lasting, although characters often fall in love quickly in Murdoch's novels. But Murdoch's apparent happy ending is more obviously

troubled by the fact that Harvey ends up with Sefton when he began the novel in love with her sister Aleph. Harvey and Sefton's decision to marry at the end of the novel seems to indicate that Harvey has finally reached some level of maturity. The two lovers share their feeling that they have been "transformed" (391) into "divine beings" (390) by their affair. However, Harvey seemed just as sincere when he told Aleph a hundred pages earlier, "I love you, I want us to be together forever, I can't bear the idea of being separated from you . . . you are so beautiful, you are the most beautiful creature in the world" (263). It is only after Aleph has eloped with Lucas Clement, a family friend, that Harvey begins to find her sister attractive. He is drunk the first time that he kisses her. The fact that Peter Mir, a mysterious Russian gentleman whose influence causes many of the romances in the novel to blossom, is revealed at the end of *The Green Knight* to be an escaped mental patient, also introduces irony into the fairy-tale unions that end Murdoch's novel.

Murdoch's use of "Hansel and Gretel" in *The Green Knight* clarifies how the relationships that children have with their parents affect their engagement with others as adults. It is somewhat surprising that Murdoch has elected to draw upon "Hansel and Gretel" to describe a process of sexual maturation, when the Grimms' tale is evidently about very young children, and only the most astute and imaginative psychoanalyst would be able to identify references to sex therein. Harvey's relationship with Louise's daughters is described several times in the novel as that of brother and sister, which makes his desiring one of them, and having sex with and marrying another, as disturbing as his very physical relationship with his sexy mother, who sleeps in his bed whenever she needs a place to stay in London. But *The Green Knight* is not alone in its use of

"Hansel and Gretel" to illuminate the plight of lovers. Other novelists have similarly invited us to consider that the relationships we form as children affect the way we relate to people as adults. Murdoch uses the tale again in *A Severed Head* (1961), *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974) and *An Accidental Man* (1971), in all three novels comparing lovers seeking a safe place to conduct their tryst to Hansel and Gretel finding themselves alone in the forest. Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood makes the same comparison in *The Robber Bride* (1993), where Wes and his girlfriend Tony, abandoned by the witch-like Zenia who has tired of her affair with Wes, are compared to Hansel and Gretel left alone in the forest. In British novelist Graham Swift's novel *Waterland* (1983), Tom Crick and his girlfriend Helen, who are much too young to be having a baby, are compared to Hansel and Gretel throughout a long and horrific narrative which sees them journeying onto the moors to get Helen an abortion from a local "witch."

Murdoch said, "Oh, I think art consoles, I don't see why not. The thing is to console without telling lies" (Bigsby, Interview 230), and "stories are a very good way, you know, of getting away from one's troubles" (Brans, Interview with Murdoch 192). Consolation is one of the things which "Hansel and Gretel," like other fairy tales, offers the reader, as it does for Will and Leo in Byatt's *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996). But it also teaches difficult lessons about relationships which the novels of Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt repeat. Jack Zipes has noted that in "Hansel and Gretel," as in many fairy tales, the forest is a place of truth:

> A prince, a foundling, a miller, a miller's daughter, Thumbling, a sorcerer, a brother, a sister, a king, a forester, a princess, three poor brothers, a blockhead, a discharged soldier, a miller's apprentice, a tailor and a shoemaker, a hedgehog/

> human, a hunter, a poor servant girl, a poor man, a poor tailor, a pious, good little girl, St. Joseph, a hermit, and the Virgin Mary. These are just a few of the characters in the Grimms' tales whose fates are decided in the forest, and it is interesting to note that the forest is rarely enchanted though enchantment takes place there. The forest allows for enchantment and disenchantment, for it is the place where society's conventions no longer hold true. It is the source of natural right, thus the starting place where social wrongs can be righted. (Zipes, *Brothers* 45)

In Drabble's *The Realms of Gold* (1975), it is not a happy truth which is learned in the forest, but an awareness of the horrifying impact which parents and children might have on each other's lives. In the novel, Frances Wingate has to acknowledge that not every child is given an equal opportunity to attain the "golden worlds" (Drabble, *Realms* 104) of love and success, when her nephew Stephen kills himself and his infant daughter with a drug overdose in a misguided attempt to protect the child from the "soul-destroying fear" of death (300) which has dogged his own life. Their bodies are discovered "in a hollow in a wood, under tree roots, wrapped up in the sleeping bag together" (301). Will and Leo in Byatt's novels, like Jane Gray's children in Drabble's *The Waterfall* (1969) and Harvey Blacket in Murdoch's *The Green Knight* (1993), have learned a difficult truth from their connection with their parents. They have become acquainted with the risks involved in intimate relationships – the anxiety, resentment and guilt which can dominate those bonds. It is knowledge which, as we shall see in Chapter Three of this essay, they will take with them into their adult lives and the risky but rewarding love affairs that await.

Chapter Two

"Cinderella"

"Cinderella" is one of the best-known and one of the most controversial fairy tales. The tale's apparent emphasis on marriage as a solution means that for many contemporary writers, the character of Cinderella tends to function less as a role model than as a negative example. Marcia Lieberman uses "Cinderella" and "Snow White" prominently in her article, "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale" (1972). Karen Rowe focuses on "Cinderella" in her article, "Feminism and Fairy Tales" (1979), which proposes that "fairy tales are not just entertaining fantasies, but powerful transmitters of romantic myths which encourage women to internalize only aspirations deemed appropriate . . . within a patriarchy" (Rowe 211). Marina Warner argues that fairy tales like "Cinderella," which highlight female competition for the attention of a male, "bear witness against women" (Warner 210). Warner dedicates a chapter to "Cinderella" in her critique of female roles in fairy tales, *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994). Ruth Bottigheimer also dedicates a chapter to "Cinderella" in her *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales* (1987), a study arguing that despite the suggestion of some fairy-tale commentators that male and female protagonists are interchangeable in the tales,[6] the Grimms' tales outline "gender-specific and gender-appropriate behaviour" that includes "radically different moral expectations for girls" (Bottigheimer 168). American Colette Dowling published a best-

[6] Bottigheimer is referring to Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976).

selling self-help book, which proposed that women have an unconscious tendency to make themselves emotionally dependent upon men, and called it *The Cinderella Complex* (1981). "Like Cinderella," Dowling says, "women today are still waiting for something external to transform their lives" (Dowling 31).

Given the popularity of the view that "Cinderella" contributes to female acculturation by rewarding passivity with marriage, it comes as something of a surprise that Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt should draw upon the tale to describe characters searching for identity, without recommending either marriage or passivity (rather the opposite, in fact), and without even restricting the starring role to women. There is, however, an ambivalence present in each writer's use of "Cinderella." References to the fairy tale illuminate the personal and professional achievements of Liz Headleand, in Drabble's trilogy consisting of *The Radiant Way* (1987), *A Natural Curiosity* (1989) and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991), although Liz's fierce ambition and the failure of her two marriages would seem to make her an unlikely Cinderella. In fact, Liz is not a very likable person, having sacrificed close relationships for career success. This aligns her more closely with the protagonist of the Grimms' tale than with the sweet-tempered heroine of the French version of "Cinderella." In Murdoch's novel, *The Italian Girl* (1964), the tale of "Cinderella" clarifies the experiences of a male character dominated by his mother, with Edmund Narraway filling not just the role of the prince, as one might expect, but also that of Cinderella. But the ending to Murdoch's novel, where Edmund lets go of his mother but marries his nursemaid, introduces an irony into her use of the fairy tale. Byatt's Frederica Potter, the protagonist of the trilogy (planned as four books), *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996), is

unaware of her resemblance to Cinderella until she has already married, at which point, instead of a stepmother, Frederica's husband Nigel figures as her oppressor, and escaping marriage, rather than entering into it, furnishes the climax of her tale. Unfortunately, the marriage with Nigel seems to have extinguished Frederica's desire for any further romantic entanglements.

In each novel, characters who have rejected family connections in order to build an independent life of their own must revisit them in order to be healed from what the world has done to them since then. Drabble's Liz Headleand has tried to shut her mother and her sister out of her life, but the mystery of her father's absence during her childhood continues to haunt her. In Murdoch's novel, the death of Edmund Narraway's mother does not end her domination of him, a fact which is made clear when he returns home for her funeral. Byatt's Frederica Potter distanced herself from her family when she married, and the failure of her marriage forces her to acknowledge how she has resembled her mother, a housewife with a college degree. These novels highlight a feature of "Cinderella" that tends to be overshadowed by its marriage plot. In each case, characters striving to distinguish themselves from their families without breaking that tie completely are compared to "Cinderella," a tale showing a young woman alternately aided and impeded by family connections in her journey towards adulthood. "I am their child . . . . whether I like it or not" (Drabble, *Millstone*, 144-145), considers Rosamund Stacey in Drabble's novel, *The Millstone* (1965), echoing the sentiments of adult characters throughout Drabble's novels. Jane Gray in *The Waterfall* says of her parents, "I repudiate them, with pain I do so, dangerously I do so" (Drabble, *Waterfall* 59). In each of these novels by Drabble, a character who has initially rejected her parents in the course of

becoming an adult finds that she must finally acknowledge their impact on her personality. Frances Wingate in *The Realms of Gold* used to comfort herself with the thought that "at least she wouldn't be like her mother," but it "had done her no good . . . . she had in fact behaved exactly like her mother" (Drabble, *Realms* 69). The complex connection between an adult character and his or her mother, which is a central theme for Drabble, is also important to Byatt's novels, and of interest to Murdoch as well. Novels by these writers make use of "Cinderella," which appears, upon a first reading, to focus on either the hazards of courtship or sibling rivalry, to show adult characters coming to terms with their parents' impact on their lives.

"Cinderella" is one of the best-known fairy tales. At least 300 versions of the tale have been identified around the world by folklore scholars – more, if one includes other tales of female disguise uncovered by a prince, such as the Grimms' "All Fur." It may also be one of the earliest oral tales – or folk tales – to eventually make its way into the written form known as fairy tales: the oldest known written version of "Cinderella" comes from ninth-century China. Some variants feature a male protagonist, as in a Norwegian tale cycle involving Askeladden, or "the Ash Lad" – generally the youngest son, a dreamer, despised by his family and consigned by them to the hearth. Usually, however, it is a downtrodden young woman at the centre of the tale, who competes with the other females in her household – sometimes viciously – for the attentions of a rescuing prince. In North America, the version of "Cinderella" best known to us is that published by French fairy-tale collector Charles Perrault in his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (1697). Perrault's version, "Cendrillon," inspired the $4.247-million grossing Disney animated film of 1949, with its fairy godmother, pumpkin coach and

glass slipper.[7] The Grimms' version of "Cinderella," entitled "Aschenputtel" in German, which was apparently derived from a combination of three complementary tales from the Hesse region (Opies 153), is somewhat different from the French tale.

In the Grimms' tale, Cinderella's mother on her deathbed advises her daughter to "be good and pious" and, "I shall look down from heaven and take care of you." After her mother's death, Cinderella visits her grave every day and weeps. Cinderella's father, "a rich man," marries again before a year has passed, and his second wife brings with her two daughters who are beautiful but have "nasty and wicked hearts." Before long, they have bullied Cinderella into the position of household servant, assigning her meaningless tasks like picking lentils out of the ashes, and taking away her bed so that she has to sleep next to the hearth. One day the father asks his daughters what he should bring back for them from a fair. The stepdaughters ask for dresses and jewels, but Cinderella requests that he bring her the twig that brushes against his hat on the way home. She plants the twig – from a hazel bush – on her mother's grave, and waters it with her tears until it grows into a beautiful bush. A little white bird roosts in the bush and grants all of Cinderella's wishes.

When the king invites all the marriageable girls in the country to a three-day festival aimed at finding his son a bride, the stepsisters and their mother go to the ball, but they refuse to let Cinderella attend. Cinderella requests a gold and silver dress and silk slippers from the bird in the hazel bush, and attends the ball three times in disguise.

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[7] Dollar figure is for the film's first release alone. Jane Yolen, "America's Cinderella," *Cinderella: A Casebook*, ed. Alan Dundes (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1982) 302.

On the first two occasions, the prince dances exclusively with Cinderella, who escapes from him at the end of the evening by hiding first in a dovecote, then in a pear tree. On the third evening, the prince has the staircase coated in pitch, so that one of Cinderella's slippers remains behind. The prince brings the slipper to Cinderella's house, promising to marry the woman who can wear it. The two stepsisters mutilate their feet to make the slipper fit – one cutting off a toe and the other part of her heel – but as the prince is carrying each of them away on his horse, two pigeons in the hazel bush on the grave sing out to warn him of the bloody foot that reveals the deception. Finally, the prince tries the slipper on Cinderella, against the objections of her family, and discovers that she is his "true bride." At the wedding, Cinderella's two pigeons peck out the stepsisters' eyes.

One notable difference between the Grimms' "Cinderella" and the French version of the tale is the continuation in the German tale of the dead mother's influence – as she had promised on her deathbed, when she told Cinderella, "I shall look down from heaven and take care of you" – in the form of a bird who roosts on her grave and grants Cinderella's wishes. It could be argued that in Perrault's tale, Cinderella's "godmother, who was a fairy,"[8] has some connection with the dead mother, who was "the nicest person in the world," but this connection is not made explicit as it is in the Grimms' tale. In numerous versions of the Cinderella tale from around the world, some "fetish" of the mother, as Marie-Louise von Franz has called it (von Franz, "Wassilissa" 208), remains with Cinderella after her mother's death, "representing the deepest essence of the mother

[8] Charles Perrault, *Perrault's Complete Fairy Tales*, trans. A.E. Johnson (1961; London: Penguin, 1999) 57. All quotations from Perrault's fairy tales in this essay are taken from this volume.

figure, though not the human side" (209). In the Russian version of "Cinderella," "The Beautiful Wassilissa," the protagonist's dying mother gives her a doll that helps her by comforting her, doing much of the housework her stepmother assigns her, and protecting her in her contest against the witch, Baba Yaga, when her stepmother sends her into the woods to get fire (von Franz, "Wassilissa"). In a version from Jutland[9] recounted by R.D. Jameson, a voice from the mother's grave instructs the girl to strike a tree three times to obtain dresses. In a Norwegian version also recounted by Jameson, an angel at the mother's grave comforts the protagonist.

Scholars taking a psychoanalytical approach to fairy tales have proposed that, in the tales, complex personalities are typically split among several characters, more obviously "good" or "bad." In Chapter One of this essay, the connection between Hansel and Gretel's stepmother and the witch in the forest furnished one example. We can see this same process at work in "Cinderella," in the protagonist's striving to negotiate simultaneously the wishes of her dead mother and her living stepmother. Cinderella has two problems with her mother. Her loving, biological mother is dead, and yet she continues to have an impact on her daughter's life, her influence typically continuing in the form of a bird, a cow, an angel, or – as in Perrault's version – a fairy godmother. Meanwhile, Cinderella's bad mother – typically a stepmother – is making her life miserable by interfering in the heroine's attempts to explore her sexual maturity with an eligible mate (the prince). With its heroine trying to determine where her familial obligations end and she begins, the tale of "Cinderella" is useful to Murdoch, Drabble

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[9] The peninsula which includes mainland Denmark and the northern German state of Schleswig-Holstein.

and Byatt in their exploration of the "vast web, a vast network" (Drabble, *Radiant* 73) of responsibilities that joins us – to strangers at times, but more obviously and more intimately to members of our families.

David Pace observes of Perrault's "Cinderella," "It is clear that on a psychological level, the myth simply has divided the real mother – a being for whom the most violently conflicting emotions are experienced – into two different mother surrogates: the stepmother, who may be hated without guilt, and the godmother, who may be loved without reservation" (Pace 255). Bruno Bettelheim agrees that the stepmother represents a "displacement" of Cinderella's negative feelings about her mother (Bettelheim 249). He suggests that the tale chronicles a period of adolescence in which it seems to the girl that the mother who once doted on her is now critical of everything that she does (256). Ben Rubenstein – like Bettelheim, taking a Freudian approach to the tale – suggests that these negative feelings have in fact necessitated the symbolic death of the good mother, at a time in Cinderella's life when she can only see the bad things about her parent: "the good mother no longer exists because she is now a bad figure, a rival" for the attention of males, such as the prince and Cinderella's father (Rubenstein 224). Marina Warner has expressed concern about the popularity of this interpretation, suggesting that it rationalizes hatred of women: "The bad mother has become an inevitable, even required ingredient in fantasy," she objects, "and hatred of her a legitimate, applauded stratagem of psychic survival" (Warner 212). Indeed, Cinderella's resentment of her mother is illustrated not only by the appearance of the wicked stepmother who may represent some aspect of her, but also by the number of variants of the tale that depict the heroine bringing her sufferings on herself by killing her biological mother, or being

associated in some way with her death.[10] But Bettelheim argues that this fairy-tale splitting "serves the child well," in that "[t]he fantasy of the wicked stepmother not only preserves the good mother intact, it also prevents having to feel guilty about one's angry thoughts and wishes about her" (Bettelheim 68-69).

In Drabble's novel *The Radiant Way* (1987), the first volume of a trilogy continued in *A Natural Curiosity* (1989) and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991), the relationship between Liz Headleand and her mother continues to have an impact on Liz despite the forty-five-year-old psychiatrist's most determined efforts to exclude her parent from her life. Liz feels that she has been impeded in her climb toward love and professional success by her childhood in Northam, growing up in a semi-detached house that was a "chrysalis" to the metamorphosing Liz but a "tomb" (Drabble, *Radiant* 121) for her mother, a recluse who demonstrated the same faint interest in her family that she had for strangers. Liz's mother provided little for her two daughters apart from a roof over their heads and lies about their absent father. "She had kept her daughters alive" (148) is the

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[10] In a Greek version of the tale, the mother is killed and eaten by her two other, wicked daughters to settle a bet; the protagonist does not eat her but tends her grave, whereupon a blinding light emerging from the mother's grave provides her with garments for the ball. In a Serbian version recounted by W.R.S. Ralston, the protagonist's mother is turned into a cow because of the girl's own carelessness; the cow helps her for a while during the father's second marriage, and when the cow is killed and eaten by the jealous stepmother, the girl does not eat her but tends her grave afterwards, whereupon birds on the cow's grave provide her with dresses for the ball. This is similar to the well-known Scottish tale of "Rashin Coatie," or Cap o' Rushes, in which a mother before her death bequeaths her daughter a little red calf which gives her whatever she asks for. The stepmother finds out about this and orders the calf butchered. The dead calf tells Rashin Coatie to pick up its bones and bury them under a grey stone. She does so, and henceforth receives whatever she needs, including the clothing necessary to seduce the prince (in this version, it happens in Church) by going to the stone and asking the calf's spirit (Bettelheim 257-258). In a Moroccan version recounted by William Bascom, the mother turns into a cow, and similar events transpire. In a Sicilian version recounted by Ralston, "twelve damsels" emerge from the cow's grave, dress the protagonist and take her to the ball. In a version from Iran and Afghanistan recounted by Margaret Mills, the mother, who is killed by the protagonist herself on the advice of her future stepmother, reappears as a yellow cow who assists her (Margaret A. Mills, "A Cinderella Variant in the Context of a Muslim Women's Ritual," *Cinderella: A Casebook*, ed. Dundes 180-192).

best tribute Liz's sister Shirley can think of for their mother. Comparisons to Cinderella throughout the novel illuminate Liz's talent for personal improvement. She worked hard in college, and if there were princes willing to take her out, "like Cinderella, she returned at midnight" (91). But her origins trouble her, even in adulthood. In her darker moments it occurs to Liz that maybe "she is not the true princess, but only a fake princess, a scullery maid dressed up by a Cambridge scholarship and her own wits," and she worries that "if she takes a step back, all her worldly riches will crumble, like Cinderella's at midnight" (183), sending her back to where she came from. *The Radiant Way* opens with Liz thinking up excuses not to phone her mother on New Year's Eve, but, in the course of the trilogy, she is forced to come to terms with her mother's impact on her life. The darkness of that inheritance, which Liz nevertheless needs to acknowledge, contributes to the ambivalence of Drabble's novel.

Feeling oppressed by her mother as a child, Liz had entertained elaborate fantasies about a fairy-tale rescue by her father and a better life in his care. In Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's novel *The Robber Bride* (1993), Roz Andrews, a high-powered Jewish businesswoman who has some similarities with Drabble's Liz Headleand, also thinks of her father as a rescuer, when he returns with money after the war to the boarding house kept by her mother, Roz being the "down-market Cinderella" (Atwood, *Robber* 84) who scrubs the toilets. Later, she learns that her father earned his fortune by helping the Nazis steal from his own people. Similarly, Liz does not discover until years later that her mysteriously absent father had been dead for much of her childhood, having committed suicide after being charged with exposing himself to a child. As is true for Cinderella, whose father disappears during her abuse by her stepmother and stepsisters,

Liz and Roz learn that their fathers are ill-equipped to protect them from harm. It is clear to Liz as a teenager that if she is going to have the life she wants, she is not going to be able to rely on an absent father and a neglectful mother to provide it; she will have to go out and get it for herself.

And she proves ruthless in pursuit of her goals. As a girl, Liz did not seem destined for great things, being "pale and fair and thin, a colourless creature, unmade-up, drooping and slightly stooping, ill-complexioned, cardiganed, dull" (Drabble, *Radiant* 85), but she was set apart by the desire for something better, was "burning, burning, eaten up with longing" (59). Unlike Cinderella, who sees marriage as a means of escaping family, Liz approaches admission to college as the first step to achieving a better life, an attitude she shares with other ambitious heroines compared to Cinderella. In Scottish novelist Margot Livesay's *Criminals* (1995), for instance, Mollie "slid into university life like Cinderella into her slipper" (Livesay, *Criminals* 165). And valuing time to study over romance – "like Cinderella, she returned at midnight" (Drabble, *Radiant* 91) – is something Liz has in common with the heroine of Drabble's latest novel, *The Peppered Moth* (2001); Bessie Bawtry's ambition to do well in school means that her boyfriend Joe is often abandoned in favour of studying, left waiting in his tradesman's van that he hides way down the drive from her house, because although it is "[n]ot quite a pumpkin . . . it would not have done as a conveyance for Bessie" (Drabble, *Peppered* 91). While Bessie has a natural aptitude for schoolwork, Liz has to struggle for her achievements. In the midst of preparing for her entrance exams, Liz asks her sister Shirley, a girl with much more modest ambitions who will marry at nineteen and settle in her home town, "If you really want something badly enough, do you think you get it?" (Drabble, *Radiant* 59).

She suggests to Shirley the possibility that you have to suffer for what you want, and Shirley says, "Ah, that's what I can't stand, the suffering . . . I won't suffer." Whereupon "Liz stared at her, coldly. 'Then you won't get,' she said. 'You won't get'" (60). Even as a teenager, Liz has made up her mind that she is going to have to tear what she wants out of the world, and has come to terms with the possibility that she will be hurt along the way.

Her ambition and her willingness to take action to satisfy it align Liz more closely with the German Cinderella than with the comparatively passive heroine of the French tale. The Grimms' version of "Cinderella" explores the merits of action. Jane Yolen says of the Grimms' Cinderella, "She makes intelligent decisions, for she knows that wishing solves nothing without the concomitant action." In fact, Cinderella's willingness to advance her own interests results in some less-than-heroic behaviour that her solicitous tending of her mother's grave might not quite balance out. Cinderella values justice over mercy, if she cares about either, as is illustrated when, at the end of the Grimms' version, her pigeons peck out her stepsisters' eyes. She does not prevent her stepsisters from cutting up their feet to fit the prince's slipper, although, as the true bride, she must realize that this mutilation is not going to enable them to marry the prince. In some versions of the tale, Cinderella is even a murderer; her mother or her first stepmother dies because Cinderella kills her by closing the lid of a trunk on her head, generally to advance the cause of a duplicitous female friend (a governess in Giambatista Basile's (1575-1632) influential tale "The Cat Cinderella," featured in the tale cycle *Il Pentamerone*; a teacher in a version of "Cinderella" from Iran and Afghanistan recounted by Margaret Mills) who subsequently marries the widowed father and gives Cinderella cause to regret her

decision. Even if it sometimes interferes with the happiness of others, therefore, Cinderella, as she is often depicted, takes action to make her own life better. Yolen suggests that, its nasty outcomes aside, Cinderella's determination makes the character symbolic of "the true magic inside all of us – the ability to change our own lives, the ability to control our own destinies" (Yolen 299).

Modern writers of fiction have explored the questionable value of "Cinderella" to a contemporary female audience. Margaret Atwood expresses sympathy for Cinderella's stepsisters in her prose poem, "Unpopular Gals" (*Good Bones*, 1992): "As for the prince," her narrator says, "you think I didn't love him? I loved him more than she did; I loved him more than anything. Enough to cut off my foot . . . . But all my love ever came to was a bad end" (Atwood, "Unpopular" 26). In Marina Warner's novel *Indigo* (1992), the novel's likable protagonist, Miranda, figures as the "ugly sister" to her more fortunate and more beautiful sister Xanthe. Drabble's first novel, *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963), similarly questions the "message" of "Cinderella," with protagonist Sarah Bennett's beautiful sister Louise compared to Cinderella, and Sarah to "one of her ugly sisters" (Drabble, *Summer* 14). Like Cinderella, Louise marries for money, but, unlike the fairy-tale heroine, she ends up miserable. Drabble's novel is therefore ambivalent in its use of fairy tales. Even here, however, Drabble takes the opportunity to argue the relevance of fairy tales for a modern audience:

> 'Oh Lordy,' said Louise, 'you must be the only person in the world who doesn't know the answer to that question. I married him for his money, of course,'
>
> 'Did you really?' I was full of shock and admiration.

'Of course I did. What other attraction do you think he could have for anyone?'

'But Loulou, what a terribly wicked thing to do . . . . I think you're the only person I know who married for money. I know they're always doing it in books but I thought it was just a novelist's convention. Do you think all those other things like wicked stepmothers are true too? All the fairy-story things?'

'I think it's more than likely,' said Louise. (195)

British novelist Fay Weldon uses "Cinderella" with bitter irony in describing failed or unhappy marriages. In her novel, *The Hearts and Lives of Men* (1992), comparisons of Helen and Clifford with Cinderella and her prince set the reader up for disappointment when their marriage fails.

Theorists expressing concern about the depiction of women in "Cinderella" typically highlight that fairy tale's emphasis on marriage as a solution to a girl's troubles. It is principally the passivity of the tale's heroine, who endures her misery until a man comes along to lift her out of it, that troubles readers of "Cinderella." Marcia Lieberman proposes that, because victimized girls in fairy tales are "invariably rescued and rewarded, indeed glorified," as Cinderella is, "children learn that suffering goodness can afford to remain meek, and need not and perhaps should not strive to defend itself, for if it did so perhaps the fairy godmother would not turn up for once, to set things right at the end." Thus, "[s]ubmissive, meek, passive female behaviour is suggested and rewarded" in fairy tales (Lieberman 193-194). Karen Rowe agrees that, since "forceful" female characters like the stepmother in "Cinderella" are horribly punished, young readers "readily identify with the prettily passive heroine whose submission to commendable

roles insures her triumphant happiness" (Rowe 218). But the Grimms' version of "Cinderella" invites a different assessment of the heroine's character from what these scholars have observed. It is likely that they had Perrault's tale in mind, where the protagonist is introduced as "exceptionally sweet and gentle," and where the story ends with her marrying her sisters to two gentlemen of her husband's court and inviting them to live with her in the castle. But Jane Yolen notes that, although Disney and mass-market children's books have made Cinderella "a good, malleable, forgiving little girl" (Yolen 301), the original protagonist was a "tough, resilient heroine" (297), demonstrating "shrewdness, inventiveness, and grace under pressure" (298), qualities that the Grimms' version of the tale underlines.

Drabble's Liz Headleand, as a psychiatrist interested in what mythology can tell her about the psychic troubles she encounters in her patients, realizes that "mythology, literature, are full of stories of the equalizing power of suffering, of the reductive power of loss and death and fear. The king willing to exchange all earthly riches for a living child, for an hour of life, for freedom from pain" (Drabble, *Radiant* 128). Max Lüthi has observed that fairy tells tell us "how suffering can purify and strengthen" (Lüthi, *Once* 144), something which is certainly true for Cinderella, her abuse at the hands of her stepmother and stepsisters strengthening her resolve to begin a new life elsewhere. For Liz, suffering through difficulties is also a means to an end. Although "change is painful, transition is painful" (Drabble, *Radiant* 33), Liz knows from experience that it is necessary. "There is a goal to this journey, there will be an arrival, Liz believes. It is only by refusing to move onwards that we truly die" (18). In her willingness to take action to change her life for the better, Liz resembles another Drabble heroine in

particular, Frances Wingate in *The Realms of Gold* (1975), who, in her career as an archeologist, "had clung to activity and movement as an escape" (Drabble, *Realms* 83). Her life has been active for so long, Frances can not imagine a more leisurely existence. As admirable as Liz's ambition is, however, the reader of Drabble's trilogy must recognize what it has cost her. In "Cinderella," ambition brings the heroine out of her difficult family life and into a happy marriage. But in Drabble's novel, Liz's two marriages have failed and she has to return to her family in order to better understand what they have meant to her. Drabble has therefore introduced an ambivalence into her use of the Grimms' fairy tale.

Liz's determination sometimes has a negative impact on her relationships. Far from being transformed by marriage, we are told that Liz was "reborn" after her divorce (Drabble, *Radiant* 101), from her first husband Edgar Lintot, after only eight months of marriage. "Why ever did we marry so young?" she and her friend Alix, who had her own marital troubles at the time, asked each other. Nor did Liz's second marriage, to television executive Charles Headleand, offer her a fairy-tale metamorphosis. Rather than being swept away by princes at the end of their story, women in Drabble's trilogy tend to dominate the men in their lives. Over the years, Charles has actually become "frightened" of Liz, wondering if she has somehow "sapped his energy" (115). She and her friends "teased him, tolerated him, avoided him . . . . They were impervious both to his charm and to his aggression: they had neutralized him" (24). Perhaps it is no surprise, given her contempt for him, that Charles soon leaves Liz for another woman – another fairy-tale bride, the "Ice Queen" Lady Henrietta (31). And Liz is not the best friend a person could have, either, although there is no shortage of people in her life willing to

tolerate her. Her friend Alix, putting on her makeup for Liz's party, compares herself to Cinderella's stepsisters. "Alix has always felt rather sorry for the poor competitive disappointed Ugly Sisters . . . . But she does not feel sorry for her friend Liz Headleand" (3). Liz's friends, Esther and Alix, more vulnerable to money and marital problems than Liz, greet the news of her divorce with private satisfaction: they consider, "It would do her good, to be reminded of what life could be like" (127). Moreover, the fact that Liz never shows any awareness of her friends' resentment of her success prevents one from concluding that she learns a lesson from those relationships.

If she has not been a conventional wife or a reliable friend, Liz has not been everything her mother could wish for in a daughter, either. To her mind, Liz's troubled relationship with her mother has provided one of the main obstacles to her happiness. And her success beyond the expectations of her family has fuelled her contempt for them as an adult. She has abandoned her aged mother and her sister Shirley, a disappointed housewife, to each other's company in her dreary home town of Northam, neglecting even to phone her mother on special occasions, and admits that she "hoped her mother would die, soon" (Drabble, *Radiant* 132). When her mother is hospitalized because of a stroke, but fails to die promptly, we are shown Liz "barely bothering to disguise her irritation" (353). In *A Natural Curiosity* (1989), when Liz hears of Shirley's husband committing suicide by leaving the car running in the garage, and her sister's subsequent disappearance, her response is not what one might expect of a character confronting a family tragedy: "Oh God, what a nuisance my family are," she says. "If it's not one, it's another," but she is not "too put out" because it "would take more than a suicide and a vanishing trick to upset Liz Headleand" (Drabble, *Natural* 100). It is a feature of her

journey of self-discovery that Liz must leave off resenting her family and acknowledge how they, and her mother in particular, have had an impact on her life.

While Cinderella's stepmother is interfering in her daughter's sexual development, the protagonist must also come to terms with the ambiguous presence of her real mother in her life; she must determine whether or not that relationship, with a mother who has died but remains a presence, has ended. Jungian Marie-Louise von Franz suggests that the fact that the mother is dead but her "fetish" continues to impact Cinderella's life shows the girl is torn between her connection with her mother, which permits "continuity of the same form of life, with the idea that everything goes smoothly and life goes on," and her own individuation, which an intimate connection with the mother would prevent:

> If the mother dies, that means, symbolically, a realization that the daughter can no longer be identical with her, though the essential positive relationship remains. Therefore the mother's death is the beginning of the process of individuation; the daughter feels that she wants to be a positive feminine being, but in her own form, which entails going through all the difficulties of finding that. (von Franz, "Wassilissa" 209)

Bruno Bettelheim does not see this continuation of the mother's presence as interfering with the process of individuation, as von Franz does. He suggests that the bird, the angel, the light from the grave is an "embodiment" of "good mothering" which the child experienced in the earliest part of her life, "the heritage which a good mother confers on her child which will stay with him, and preserve and sustain him in direst distress" (Bettelheim 258). He says that the tree that Cinderella plants on her mother's grave and

waters with her tears "symbolizes that the memory of the idealized mother of infancy, when kept alive as an important part of one's internal experience, can and does support us even in the worst adversity" (257).

Other novels by Drabble detail the on again, off again relationship between a woman and a parent or older relative who has withdrawn from society. In each case, the protagonist experiences both dread and fascination regarding the life led by this older woman, seeing the merits in the withdrawal from troubling human contact, but distancing herself out of fear that she will end up that way herself. Kate Armstrong's mother in *The Middle Ground* (1980) is agoraphobic. Frances Wingate's great aunt, in *The Realms of Gold* (1975), lives in a rundown shack in the country, rejecting visitors until she dies with her stomach full of cardboard, apparently the victim of starvation. In *The Peppered Moth* (2001), Bessie Bawtry, a lifelong hypochondriac, retires to bed for the last half of her life and leaves her daughters to look after themselves, her daughter Chrissie seeing her mother's withdrawal as "indirect and protracted revenge for the disappointments of her own life" (Drabble, *Peppered* 160). The younger woman in each case, although already an adult with her own life, learns that she must yet undergo a delayed process of differentiation from her parent, exploring their similarities and differences. Similarly, friends of Frederica Potter, in Byatt's series, see her having to "apply her intelligence" to playing with her son Leo, because her own mother had not played with her (Byatt, *Babel* 246). Friends of Drabble's Liz Headleand also recognize that Liz, "who had never received, as far as one could tell, a motherly kiss or hug in her life" (Drabble, *Radiant* 156), has had to teach herself to be affectionate with her own children.

Liz excludes her mother from her life as much as possible, but once in a while,

when she is talking to her sister Shirley about her, she experiences "a moment of apprehension, of half recognition of something that she did not wish to know, something she needed to know" (Drabble, *Radiant* 132). It is ironic that Liz, a psychiatrist, who is "considered an expert in these matters" and writes papers on foster care and adoption, should resist acknowledging for so long the importance of her mother in her life, and the necessity of strengthening that relationship. Later, she sees the irony, thinking, "Physician, heal thyself. Physician, know thyself' (144). When her mother dies of a stroke, Liz decides to "explore once more those dark labyrinthine strong-smelling chambers and passages" (145) of her childhood. She and Shirley sort through their mother's belongings and discover evidence that their father killed himself after coming under suspicion for exposing himself to a child – hence, their mother's secrecy about him. And later, in *A Natural Curiosity*, Liz learns that her mother had a child by another man before she married Liz's father. She meets her half-sister Marcia at a party, and their friendship helps Liz to put her past in perspective. She sees that her mother's having a child out of wedlock, as Marcia herself describes it, was the "disgrace" and the "fatal error" that "hung over her" (Drabble, *Natural* 272) and that made her such an odd parent. Learning about this secret in her mother's past enables Liz to understand why there had always been a distance between them: "It seems now as though I'd known it all my life" (270), she tells Marcia. It is not easy for Liz to revisit her past; even though she has faced down so much else in her life, her past has made her "deeply, deeply, in the small hours, afraid" (Drabble, *Radiant* 171). But confronting her relationship with her mother has made progress possible at a time when, newly divorced, she has begun to feel that the meaningful part of her life has been coming to a close. She has been able to

"turn back in order to leap forwards" (145).

In Drabble's *The Middle Ground* (1980), Kate Armstrong's friend Hugo thinks of her as "a freak escape from the general doom" (Drabble, *Middle* 15). Frances Wingate, in *The Realms of Gold* (1975), acknowledges, "She did seem to have amazing powers of survival and adaptation" (Drabble, *Realms* 12). But good fortune alone can not account for the happiness that these women achieve in their lives. Each of them has worked hard to get what she wants. New Year's celebrations, with their promise of midnight transformations, have traditionally made Liz Headleand anxious, inviting her to reflect on her fortunate success, almost too good to be true: "She had never deserved it. She had reached too high, travelled too far" (Drabble, *Radiant* 121). But the midnight celebrated at the opening of *The Radiant Way* does not anticipate her being left bereft of all that she has achieved. Rather, over the course of the trilogy, Liz becomes a friend to her ex-husband Charles, connects with her estranged sister, and comes to terms, in a way, with her mysterious parents. More confident than ever about who she is, Liz considers, "Ah, life is amazingly exhilarating" (Drabble, *Gates* 458) at another party towards the end of the third novel of the trilogy, *The Gates of Ivory*. Bad things certainly happen to Liz, and to her friends, Esther and Alix, but the trilogy concludes by anticipating a walking tour of England the three are to enjoy. The narrator says, "the weather of England has changed utterly, and . . . the summer of '89 will bring them blue skies and unclouded sunshine, an unimagined and unchanging radiance. They will be rewarded . . . with the glory of Paradise" (460). Perhaps one is not meant to take seriously the unrestrained optimism of Drabble's ending. If there is a note of irony at the end of the three novels, however, it does not detract from the power of their theme: that a person's determination might allow

them to transform their life. As Liz Headleand's experience illustrates, however, such radical change does not come without a cost. The family ties that she has broken in order to achieve success in her career must be re-established in order for her to enjoy her achievements.

Resentment of mothers, and the extent to which they affect the adult lives of their children, are themes which are also explored in Murdoch's novel *The Italian Girl* (1964), the story of a bitter, unfulfilled middle-aged man coming to terms with his mother's death and with his long-standing resentment of her. Edmund Narraway, a wood engraver, arrives at his childhood home to bury his mother, Lydia, who had occupied the home until her death, sharing it with Edmund's brother Otto, a stone mason, and Otto's wife Isabel and his daughter Flora, who is just entering technical college to study textile design. Edmund and Otto's father had been a wood engraver also, and his inheritance is apparent in the interests pursued by his sons and even by his granddaughter. His influence over the family ended there, however, for it is clear that the sons and their father were dominated by Edmund's mother all of their lives, a circumstance that Edmund now regrets:

> My father had passed from us almost unnoticed, we believed in his death long before it came. Yet my father had not been a nonentity . . . he must indeed have been an impressive person, a talented and perhaps a fine person. Yet my early memories are not of my father, but of my mother one day saying to us: Your father is not a good man, he is merely a timid man with unworldly tastes. We felt for him a faint contempt and later pity. (Murdoch, *Italian* 17)

Edmund's father was absent, in a sense, even while he was still around, much as fathers

tend to be in fairy tales. Cinderella's father retreats from her story soon after he makes his second marriage, and fails to intervene to prevent his daughter's suffering at the hands of his new wife and her wicked daughters. He reappears briefly, near the end of the story, but ultimately, his role is minor and the story would not be much different without him. As Marie-Louise von Franz has observed of the Grimms' tale, "The whole drama takes place in the feminine realm" (von Franz, "Wassilissa" 208).

While Edmund's relationship with his father was too distant, his connection with his mother was obviously too intimate. Edmund is aware that there was something unnatural about his relationship with his mother while he was growing up. In fact, Lydia related to her sons much as she had related to their father, insisting that they call her by her first name. "My mother's affections had early turned away from her husband," Edmund recalls, "and focused with rapacious violence upon her sons, with whom she had had, as it were, a series of love-affairs" (Murdoch, *Italian* 15-16). Their nearly incestuous communication echoes in the house after her death. When Edmund arrives for her funeral, he finds everyone sleeping with everyone else, none of them involved with the people they ought to be with. His brother Otto has turned his sexual attentions away from his wife Isabel and towards the sister of his live-in apprentice. Isabel, meanwhile, is having an affair with the apprentice, and is pregnant with his child, as we learn at the end of the novel. Otto and Isabel's daughter Flora also had an affair with the apprentice in the recent past, and is also pregnant with his child. Edmund is soon embarrassed to realize that he feels an irresistible attraction to his niece, and also to Otto's mistress. As if that were not enough, one evening when they are alone together, Isabel exposes her breasts to Edmund in an attempt to seduce him. *The Italian Girl* is

crawling with corrupt sexuality, and Edmund knows who he can blame for it: "My relations with women always followed a certain disastrous and finally familiar pattern," he considers. "I did not need a psychoanalyst to tell me why" (24). It is clear that Edmund holds his mother responsible for his own sexual confusion, and perhaps for that of the rest of the family as well.

When Edmund arrives at the house, he is still a prisoner of his memories of his mother, and the novel follows his progress as he breaks free of her and the attitudes he learned from her, in order to finally enter into a supposedly meaningful relationship with the family's servant, Maggie, the "Italian girl" of the novel's title. Like Cinderella's mother, Edmund's mother is still a powerful influence in his life, in spite of her death. His reasoning is suggestive, as he seeks again and again to leave the house and the family's problems and to return to his dull solitary life: "My mother's existence here had been the reason for my not coming," he realizes. "Now her non-existence would provide an even stronger reason" (Murdoch, *Italian* 12). Edmund's mother is thereby revealed to be a stronger figure in death than she was in life. In fact, he admits, "I had not yet really conceived of her as dead" (14). Even seeing his mother's lifeless body fails to convince Edmund she is gone: he considers, "It was scarcely credible that all that power had ceased to be" (17). Although he has not had contact with her for years, Edmund realizes, "Of course I had never really escaped from Lydia. Lydia had got inside me, into the depths of my being, there was no abyss and no darkness where she was not." Edmund's situation resembles that of Cinderella in that "I kept seeming to forget that she had died, as if that didn't matter" (92). Lydia is as much of a force in Edmund's life as she was when she was alive.

"I was a prisoner of the situation" (Murdoch, *Italian* 72), Edmund realizes, but falling in love finally offers him a way out of his suffocating relationship with his mother, much as Cinderella's successfully wooing the prince allows her a means of escape from the unhealthy situation in her home. Edmund's troubles with women stem from his failure to take them seriously as complicated beings, seeing them instead as two-dimensional figures straight out of the fairy-tale realm. It is as if no woman could ever be as real to him as his mother was. Edmund is attracted to both his niece Flora and to the apprentice's sister Elsa, but sees neither as fully human. Flora is "too luminous to be really made of flesh" (46), he admits. She is a "nymph" (40), a "fairy" (21) and a "sprite" (46), with her "long glistering hair . . . bright hair" (18) arresting his attention every time he meets her, much as the blond, long-haired heroines of fairy tales work their magic on princes. Flora satisfies a fantasy of girlish innocence for Edmund, so that when she confides in him that she is pregnant, he feels "an obscure and fierce distress" (51), "horror and instinctive disgust" and "extreme agitation" (52) to discover that she is, after all, only a fallible young woman. After her revelation, he says, "I felt her being utterly changed for me" (51-52). Meanwhile, Elsa holds the opposite appeal for Edmund. With habitually smeared makeup and a moustache, she fills Edmund with "a repulsive excitement and shame" (62). He feels "degraded, tarnished" (72) by his attraction to this rather different fairy-tale figure: this "greasy enchantress" (66), "sorceress" (60), "witch" (68) or "genie" (73). It has not yet occurred to Edmund that either woman might possess a complex interior life.

But this seems to change when he falls in love with Maggie, the family's servant, although at first she is as formless and two-dimensional to him as other women.

Throughout his childhood and youth, the family had employed a series of Italian maids, and Edmund finds it difficult at first to see Maggie as distinct from the others, the brothers always having considered the Italian girls "in our minds, so merged and generalized." Maggie is just "a small dark figure" (Murdoch, *Italian* 19) to him, in her "anonymous black dress" (70). Knowing how little he thinks of her, she teases Edmund, "I am so little, almost invisible, like a mouse" (118). But nothing that happens in the house escapes Maggie's notice – certainly not Edmund's need for her, which she seems to know about even before he does. "I felt I had waked from a bad dream" (65), Edmund considers, as he learns more about the complicated relationships inside his family. Looking at Maggie, he suddenly sees her as real, so that "[n]othing could be more unlike the place where my imagination had just been roaming" (70). She becomes present to him in a way that other women never have: with "a fresh sharpness," Edmund saw Maggie "as a separate and private and unpredictable being." He realizes, "Our ancestral nurse was after all just a sort of legend," while Maggie "was quite another matter" (132). She acquires for him "what she never had before, an exterior" (133). As his mother's power diminishes in Edmund's life, it seems that other women become more real to him.

As Edmund feels himself drawn more and more to Maggie, he leaves behind the role of Cinderella for that of the prince who woos the servant. After Maggie has "metamorphosed into some quite other being" (Murdoch, *Italian* 124) for Edmund, no longer the anonymous nursemaid of his childhood memories, the two take a walk in a wooded area on the property, where Maggie loses her shoes and later has them returned to her by Edmund. Holding her shoes, he calls her by her real name, which acts upon the two of them like a "charm" (168), making clear their love for each other – rather like the

prince's recognition of Cinderella as his "true bride." Maggie's own speech is "like a transforming bell" (171), reminiscent of the midnight chimes which return Cinderella to her natural state in the French version of the fairy tale. Edmund feels "[l]ike a man in a fairy tale who is given an obscure sign" (167), and he experiences an impulse to kneel before Maggie with her shoes in his hands. The association with Cinderella and her prince implies that Edmund and Maggie are beginning a lasting love affair.

But it is not magic which has put things right. At the end of the novel, Edmund realizes that, after all, "I had had no power to heal the ills of others, I had merely discovered my own." In leading a reclusive, solitary existence, he says, "I had thought to have passed beyond life, but now it seemed to me that I had simply evaded it" (Murdoch, *Italian* 170). It is by abandoning fantasy and coming to grips with reality – in particular, his resentment of his mother and her importance in his life –that Edmund manages to transform the world for his family. The "real nature of the world" (151) becomes evident to himself and to his brother. Edmund's niece becomes "a new Flora" (158), Isabel is only now "the complete Isabel" (162). They have all been "under a spell" but are "disenchanted now. Back to real life" (129). The apprentice and his sister, malign influences, exit the story. Isabel departs for a new life in America. Maggie learns that Lydia has left her the inheritance, which she divides with the brothers. Edmund and Otto finally decide what to engrave on Lydia's gravestone, identifying her as "wife of" and "mother of" instead of just indicating her name, as they had originally planned; this suggests that they have finally established limits to their relationship with her. Maggie and Edmund set off together on a holiday in Italy.

It is not quite a "happily ever after," as Edmund indicates when he says that

"whatever joy or sorrow might come to me from this would be real and my own." No longer a mere extension of his mother's will, however, he sees that from now on, "I would be living at my own level and suffering in my own place" (Murdoch, *Italian* 170). Revisiting the setting of his childhood, Edmund feels that he has loosened its hold over him to achieve this sense of self, albeit much later in his life than Cinderella managed to do it. However, the ending to Murdoch's novel could be read as introducing irony into her use of the fairy tale. One could argue that, in marrying a successor to his childhood nursemaid, Edmund has simply replaced his mother with another maternal figure. The fact that Maggie remains mysterious to the reader to the end, that Murdoch never narrates from her point of view or permits any other kind of access to her inner life, makes her well suited for this role in the novel; lacking any distinct personality of her own, she can easily stand in for someone else in Edmund's life. As we will see again in Chapter Four, it is a serious failing in Murdoch's universe to use a lover as a replacement for something or someone else, and to disguise this as love. In her novel *Bruno's Dream* (1968), for instance, Miles asks Lisa, his wife's sister and his lover, to help him "relive" his first marriage to Parvati, the great love of his life, who was killed soon after they married. "Lisa, you're the only one I could connect with Parvait," he says. "It would give meaning to everything" (Murdoch, *Bruno's* 163). But Lisa says, "You must do that alone" (164). When Edmund indicates that he sees Maggie with "a fresh sharpness" (Murdoch, *Italian* 132), therefore, it may be simply her usefulness to him that is becoming clear.

Achieving a sense of self distinct from one's relationship with parents requires Byatt's Frederica Potter – the protagonist of her three novels *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978), *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996) – to escape a romantic union rather than

to enter into one. Because of this, she might seem to have little to do with Cinderella, who discovers who she is in the course of wooing the prince. However, Byatt makes interesting use of the Grimms' tale to illuminate the debilitating emotional and psychological distress Frederica experiences during her unhappy marriage and subsequent humiliating divorce. Like Cinderella, moreover, Frederica must work out the nature of her relationship with her family, and in particular her mother. Frederica had an antagonistic relationship with her parents since childhood. When she received news of her admission to college, she celebrated the fact that "I can get right away now, I can, can't I?" (Byatt, *Still* 26). She distanced herself from her parents even more when she married, partly because the accidental death of her sister Stephanie made family relations painful for everyone afterwards. She clung to her husband Nigel because "He was very much alive" (431-432). Ultimately, however, Frederica must reject married life as well, and acknowledge her connection with her own family in the course of strengthening her sense of who she is.

"Cinderella" similarly chronicles the protagonist's search for an identity. She must determine, on her own, the extent to which she is still her mother's daughter, how she is to figure in the lives of her stepmother and stepsisters, whether she is truly a slave or a princess. The story sees Cinderella trying on all of these roles without quite being able to make up her mind between them until the end. One wonders, for example, why Cinderella goes three times to the ball to meet the prince, only to run away from him to return to her degraded position. Bruno Bettelheim suggest that this demonstrates "the ambivalence of the young girl who wants to commit herself personally and sexually, and at the same time is afraid to do so" (Bettelheim 264). Thus, Cinderella has not yet

reached a decision about whether or not she wants to spend her future with the prince. Bettelheim also suggests that Cinderella "wants to be chosen for the person she really is, and not for her splendid appearance. Only if her lover has seen her in her degraded state and still desires her will she be his" (263-264). The reader of Byatt's trilogy can see that Frederica is similarly torn between various identities.

Frederica's associations with Cinderella do not become obvious until after her marriage to Nigel, a the wealthy son of a shipping magnate, who lives in a country house that resembles a castle, and the birth of her son Leo – events which in a fairy tale would end the story rather than set it in motion. At the obscenity trial for her friend Jude Mason's book "Babel Tower," Frederica hears him describe it as "the story of Cinderella" in a way, in that it describes "[g]etting out of the dungeon and the cinders and going to the ball or to heaven and sleeping in feather beds and eating off golden plates. Only as I got older and more suspicious," Jude says, "I saw that the place you make might turn out to be much like the place you ran away from" (Byatt, *Babel* 567). As discussed in Chapter One, Frederica had been determined, as an adolescent with her sights set on college, not to become like her mother Winnifred, a housewife with a Leeds degree in English, who – in her daughter's view – could have made something more of her life. Frederica did not want to be "washed away and thinned-down by a lifetime of self-effacement and subordination" (Byatt, *Still* 58) like her mother. Meanwhile, Winnifred had in turn determined not to be like her own mother, "mastered by a house and husband which were peremptory moral imperatives and steady physical wreckers" (Byatt, *Virgin* 111). However, as a young wife and mother, Winnifred learned the hard lesson that "it is not possible to create the opposite of what one has always known,

simply because the opposite is believed to be desired" (112). And Frederica learns that, in thinking that she could marry to escape family problems – quarrels with her parents, and the death of her sister Stephanie, which has left everyone feeling bereft – she has, in fact, implicated herself in a family history of women confined and defined by family.

Marriage and motherhood make Frederica feel like Cinderella at the beginning of the fairy tale, enslaved by her stepmother and stepsisters, relegated to the ashes of the hearth where she does not belong, and stalled from exploring her potential as the prince's bride. She must share Nigel's house with his two sisters, Olive and Rosalind, who lack her beauty but make up for it in power: "They are square dark women, with strong bones, and shadows on their upper lips" (Byatt, *Babel* 21). They do not like their brother's wife, who comes from the wrong social class, and they "let her know this . . . seeing no need for kindness" (97), and enjoying without her "their own social life, in which they do not include Frederica" (99). Nigel's divorce lawyer will later tell the court that although his client imagined he was carrying away a "princess" (517) when he married Frederica, he was subsequently disappointed by her lack of devotion, but if she is the rightful mistress of the house, Frederica is forced to take a subordinate role to everyone else who lives there, even the housekeeper. "I would have thought you had a lot of things to do," Nigel tells her pointedly, when Frederica suggests that she would like to get a job. "There is a great deal here to occupy anyone" (38). Married life reduces Frederica to the position of Cinderella in her household.

Frederica sees through her husband's attempts to contain her. "You don't care about me," she says, "You only care about your house and yourself . . . . You can't see *me*, you've no idea who I am, I am someone, I *was* someone. I am someone, someone

nobody ever sees anymore" (Byatt, *Babel* 40). David Pace has argued that Cinderella's metamorphosis from household slave to prince's bride is not so much a magical transformation (as is suggested by the ball gown she receives from the alder tree), as it is a revelation, bringing out into the open the virtues which Cinderella, as a rich man's daughter and a "good and pious" girl, already possesses, drawing her "outward, cultural attributes into harmony with her internal, natural qualities" (Pace 255). Like Cinderella, Frederica feels strongly that there is more to her than her present circumstances, as Nigel's wife and the mother of his child, make apparent. "No one . . . sees what she thinks of as Frederica" (Byatt, *Babel* 40), she imagines. It is as if "[s]he is less real than she was," although marriage "has not transformed her. She is still Frederica" (89).

Just as her mother Winnifred's situation makes her feel "as though she was boiling, an old witch in agony on her pyre" (Byatt, *Babel* 178), violent imagery begins to occur to Frederica as appropriate for describing her situation in life. More of this imagery will be explored in Chapter Three, where Frederica's story is interpreted in connection with the tale of "Bluebeard." But the violence which preoccupies Frederica, suggesting that she is in emotional or psychological distress, also invites comparisons to "Cinderella." Dealing with Nigel's sudden fits of rage, Frederica resembles Cinderella in that she feels like "a woman stepping barefoot across a bed of cinders, trying to find a path between little surrounding hot places, ready to break out into flames" (38). When Nigel forbids her leaving him the first time, "Frederica takes fire" (40), but is helpless as yet to make her own way out of his life. Later, living in an apartment in London with her son, she creates a collage diary of documents important to her life at the time, such as divorce papers and articles about parenting, and copies into it a fragment of "Cinderella"

– the passage that deals with the stepsisters mutilating their feet. She wonders idly, "Who cleaned the coagulated blood out of the shoe?" (446-447). She begins to take an obsessive interest in bloody stories in the news, copying a friend's story about a suicide attempt with a bacon-slicer into her diary. Even getting her hair cut, she feels assaulted, imagining that, when the hairdresser "nicks her skin," the hurt is "deliberately inflicted" (389), one of "many humiliations" (390) characterizing her life at that time.

Frederica recovers from the distress this imagery suggests in an unlikely way: in the course of her divorce proceedings. Although it causes her suffering, the divorce benefits Frederica by forcing her to articulate her worth as a human being, to the court and to herself. She realizes that a sense of self – so powerful before her marriage that it put many people off the "embattled" teenager she appeared (Byatt, *Virgin* 42) – is necessary to her survival, that her life is, after all, nothing more than a string of moments when she has felt "most conscious of being myself" (Byatt, *Babel* 283). Having accommodated herself to being a wife and mother, Frederica does not recover this sense of self easily. "What do I really want? Frederica asks herself, with her blood beating in her empty head in her empty room. And cannot answer. Solitary Frederica is an unreal being" (338). Gradually she realizes, despite flirtations with a number of men, that she must remain single in order to maintain her identity. She tells her lawyer that the cruellest thing Nigel did to her was to prevent her from working, since it "stopped me from being myself" (322). Her lawyer dryly replies, "Marriage is expected to have that effect" (323). Frederica knows now that she can not be herself inside a union with another person. In marriage, she lost "a separateness that was a strength." Now, it's "a little sickening" to her, the idea of being "fused" with someone else. "I am a separate

being," she resolves (314). However, having rejected her family when she got married, Frederica subsequently learns that she must now acknowledge her mother's influence on her personality in order to be happy. There is a touching scene in *Babel Tower* when Frederica takes Leo north to her parents' house for Christmas while her divorce is ongoing. They have not yet had a chance to get to know their grandson. Although all of them are aware that "Frederica's return from her long sulk or evasion is and is not the restoration of the lost daughter" (235), that wrongs between parents and child can never be put completely right, Frederica feels that her "heart lifts" as she returns by train through the grey, dark and windswept country of her childhood.

Drabble's novel *The Radiant Way* opens on a New Year's Eve party in London in 1979 celebrating the end of the decade. Middle-aged party guests, weary of "their professional and personal deformities, their doubts and enmities, their blurring vision and thickening ankles," are hoping for "a midnight transformation . . . a new self, a new life, a new, redeemed decade" (Drabble, *Radiant* 1). If the world is poised for change, personal metamorphosis is something with which the hostess, Liz Headleand, is equally familiar. Like Byatt's Frederica Potter and Murdoch's Edmund Narraway, Liz has distanced herself from her family in the course of achieving adulthood. But each of these characters is subsequently forced to acknowledge the impact of family on their life, and to turn to family for healing from the pain an independent life has brought them. Liz realizes that she must confront and explain to herself her relationship with her mother and the mystery surrounding her father, features of her childhood that have haunted her. Edmund becomes aware that, in order for him to have a romantic relationship with a woman, he will have to somehow contain his obsession with his mother. And Frederica

learns, first, that she is her mother's daughter after all, vulnerable like her to the demands of family, and then, that she belongs to no one but herself. Like Cinderella, these characters struggle to determine the appropriate place of family in their lives. Although all three come to realize that their inheritance is a bitter one, finally acknowledging the impact of parents on their personality would seem to promise them greater freedom to pursue a life of their own.

SECTION TWO – LOVERS

Chapter Three

Beast Tales I

A "Beauty and the Beast" circus act where a young woman dances with tigers, in British writer Angela Carter's novel *Nights at the Circus* (1984), appeals to the audience because it highlights "the entire alien essence of a world of fur, sinew and grace" (164). But, when the dancer and her tigers retire backstage, "theirs was not a friendly pact," and, with her human companions, the woman, Mignon, "always made love in the dark because her body was, every inch, scarred with claw marks, as if tattooed" (149). A loaded gun Mignon keeps on the piano proves its value when one of the tigers attacks her during a performance. The French fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast," first written down in the version familiar to us today by French aristocrat Madame Leprince de Beaumont in 1756, inspired a saccharine animated Disney film, and it is perhaps easy to forget that animal-bridegroom tales – a cycle of fairy tales, common throughout the world, where women marry beasts – contain a threat of harm to the woman. Iris Murdoch and Margaret Drabble are among a number of contemporary writers who have used animal-bridegroom tales and tales associated with them – the Grimms' "Bluebeard," "The Robber Bridegroom" and "Brother and Sister" – to explore the transforming effects of sexual and romantic love. But the violence implicit in the tales complicates these writers' use of the narratives to describe romantic affairs. Meanwhile, the emphasis on female responsibility – the assumption that it is a woman's job to transform a monster, in animal-bridegroom tales, and to avoid provoking a murderously jealous husband by not

invading his privacy, in the Bluebeard tales – has formed their main point of interest for other writers, among them A.S. Byatt. Angela Carter's Mignon, with her loaded gun, knows the risks involved in her relationship, but brides in this cycle of tales frequently appear oblivious to risk, or willing to marry in spite of it. "All beasts are innocent," proposes a character in Murdoch's *The Green Knight* (1993), "and princesses should be careful and not make themselves attractive to monsters" (Murdoch, *Green* 203). Some writers have therefore used these tales to explore the woman's role in a dangerous union.

The most common interpretation of the many variants of the French tale "Beauty and the Beast," wherein a prince made a beast by a sorceress is returned to his human form by the love of a woman, is that they show how we might be made over by love. Animal-bridegroom tales collected by the Grimms include "The Singing, Springing Lark" (the most similar to the French tale, but with a lion in place of a "beast"), "The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich," "Hans My Hedgehog," and "Snow White and Rose Red" (where the bridegroom is a bear). Murdoch's *The Green Knight* (1993) uses animal-bridegroom tales to propose that love and marriage change people for the better. In the novel, "beastly" men marry "innocent lambs" and the results seem to please everyone. However, as was briefly discussed in Chapter One, the fact that Peter Mir, the mysterious Russian gentleman who stands in for the beast in Murdoch's novel, turns out to be an escaped mental patient, introduces irony into the flurry of marriages inspired by him that end *The Green Knight*. The risks involved in love affairs, rather than their positive results, dominate Byatt's *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996), the second and third novels of her Frederica Potter series. In the novels, Frederica looks back on her failed marriage to the violent Nigel Reiver and considers the extent of her responsibility for

what happened in their relationship. Her conclusions are illuminated by comparisons to "Bluebeard," which critics have suggested is connected to animal-bridegroom tales, along with the Grimms' "The Robber Bridegroom." Instead of transforming the beast as the heroine does in the fairy tale, however, Frederica decides that she wants nothing more to do with romance after her experience with Nigel. In Drabble's novel *The Waterfall* (1969), animal-bridegroom tales illuminate the story of a shy woman transformed by a very physical relationship. By the novel's end, love has not only brought poet Jane Gray into the human world, it has also revived her ability to write. If the romance with her cousin's husband seems initially to dominate Jane's career, however, later it seems merely a useful source of inspiration for her writing. In this way Drabble, like Murdoch and Byatt, introduces an ambivalence into her use of the fairy tale.

The discovery that a fierce creature is really a gentleman in disguise is typical of fairy-tale revelations that appearances can be deceiving. However, the fact that the beast is transformed at the end of animal-bridegroom tales rather than at their beginning, and generally after a period wherein he and the bride have been sharing quarters, makes a kinky sexuality implicit in the tales. Maria Tatar observes that although animal-bridegroom tales have become "domesticated" through retellings, changes to the story have not extinguished the link between sexuality and bestiality which is one of "the deeper and more profound chords sounded by the tale's events" (Tatar, *Hard* 178). Freudians have no difficulty interpreting the reconciliation of a ferocious male with a gentler bride, which is achieved sometimes through tenderness, but just as often through violence; Bruno Bettelheim proposes that animal-bridegroom stories show the transformation of a girl's fear of a male's sexuality to mature love for him, which makes

his body acceptable to her (Bettelheim 289). Meanwhile, Tatar points out that bewitched husbands in fairy tales often take the form of repulsive creatures, such as reptiles, pigs, hedgehogs and donkeys. Animal husbands might also be ferocious beasts: most common are the lion, as in the Grimms' "The Singing, Springing Lark," and the bear, as in their tale, "Snow White and Rose Red." Whether they be repulsive or fierce, Tatar points out that the tradition of animal bridegrooms "is dominated by savage rather than tame beasts" (Tatar, *Hard* 176). She concludes that tales where a young woman marries a beast are "concerned with the anxiety and revulsion a child feels at the prospect of maturity and sexuality" (172).

Ideally, marriage will resolve those feelings. But reading animal-bridegroom tales as outlining the transforming effects of sexual and romantic love has not appealed to everyone. Marina Warner challenges psychoanalytic interpretations of animal-bridegroom tales, such as Bettelheim's, that focus on the beast, who is, after all, a monster, as "a sign of authentic, fully realized sexuality, which women must learn to accept if they are to become normal adult heterosexuals" (Warner 312). Jack Zipes expresses concern for what animal-bridegroom tales must say to boys. He worries that such stories bring out "what boys are socialized to expect from young women: total abandonment, nurturing, mercy, obedience, responsibility." These narratives, in which young women are compelled to put themselves at risk in order to fulfil a promise, propose that "[m]ales are not supposed to find the tenderness and compassion within themselves; they obtain such sustenance through emotional blackmail and manipulation" (Zipes, *Myth* 40-41). The bride's endurance of this manipulation also troubles scholars. "Do not think she had no will of her own," Angela Carter's narrator explains of Beauty in

her story, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," "only, she was possessed by a sense of obligation to an unusual degree" (Carter, "Mr. Lyon" 53). Carter seems to be scrambling for an explanation for her protagonist's ready acceptance of the beastly union her father promised in order to save his own life, after he was caught trespassing in the beast's garden. Zipes also feels that critics make too much of Beauty's courage. He suggests that, as an early feminist figure, created by the promoter of women's rights but family-values advocate Madame Le Prince de Beaumont, Beauty carries a certain ambivalence. "Beauty can be admired for her courage and simultaneously deprecated for submitting to the will of two men, her father and the beast" (Zipes, *Myth* 34), Zipes observes. He points out, "it is not a great step for Beauty to move to the Beast's castle because she is merely exchanging one master for another . . . . Her function in life is predetermined. Beauty must learn to tame her own desires to fit a male civilizing code" (37).

A civilizing code of sorts is at work in Murdoch's novels, including *The Green Knight* (1993). In the novel, which ends with nearly all of its single characters paired up, animal-bridegroom tales show the transforming effects of romantic love. This might seem a cliched notion, until one examines the more surprising connection Murdoch has made in her novels between romantic love and morality. As Elizabeth Dipple has observed, "evil in Murdoch's world resides in the failure of human relationship, whereas good exists in its narrow and infrequent success" (Dipple 196); falling in love is one way for a Murdoch character to become more morally aware. Loving another person involves a character tightly in the web of human responsibility that Murdoch has located at the centre of her moral universe, in the "system" of "human frailty" which creates an "endlessly spreading network" (Murdoch, *Nice* 198) of cause and effect. Byatt has called

it a "beautiful network of designed movement" (Byatt, *Game* 75) in her fiction, and Drabble's novels have also referred to "a vast web, a vast network, which was humanity itself" (Drabble, *Radiant* 73). If, in the view of these writers, we are bound even to complete strangers by the obligation to treat others kindly, then the connections forged by love affairs are necessarily more involving. In Murdoch's novels, this fact is made explicit by the association of romantic love with goodness. Dipple sees Murdoch detailing three kinds of goodness in her work: besides "self-abnegation, renunciation and withdrawl"; and the requirement "that one accept the world and know oneself in the true context of that world"; one might attain goodness in Murdoch's world through "joy, feelings of transcendence, love and religious elevation" (Dipple 79). Murdoch herself has said that religion has less to do with God than it does "with truth and love" (Brans, Interview with Murdoch 184), that it involves "love and compassion and the overcoming of self" (Meyers 220). In Murdoch's novels, therefore, falling in love does not simply make a character happier; it can make them a better person.

Animal-bridegroom tales, in which bestial husbands are transformed by love, are useful to Murdoch for illuminating this theme. In Murdoch's *The Green Knight*, characters initially resistant to romantic love, regarding it as repulsive and degrading, embrace its possibilities by the novel's end. However, some of the matches that conclude the novel show questionable judgment; it might also be seen as ironic that Peter Mir, the man this whole community accepted as their source of wisdom and guidance, is revealed at the end of the novel to be an escaped mental patient. A party at his house celebrating the numerous romantic unions that he has inspired is interrupted by a doctor and hospital attendants come to return him to the hospital. Thus, Murdoch makes

ambivalent her use of fairy tales where women marry beasts and both are improved by the experience.

Most of *The Green Knight* takes place in a house full of women: widowed Louise Anderson, who is in love with her friend Clement but prevented by memories of her husband from doing anything about her feelings; her teenage daughters Aleph, Sefton and Moy, who at the novel's beginning, anyway, want nothing to do with men; and a frequent visitor, Louise's worldly best friend Joan Blacket, who thinks that they would all benefit from sex. Louise and her daughters lead a circumscribed existence, sharing cooking and cleaning responsibilities, tenderly supporting each other when necessary, but generally spending most of their time in their own rooms, reading and daydreaming. Joan observes of Louise's daughters, "They are altogether too sedate . . . . it's time for violence, it's time for them to fly apart" (Murdoch, *Green* 8). The girls are apprehensive about "men and sex," which they generally equate, seeing them as threatening a chaos that would interrupt their serene companionship. Moy tells her sisters, "I just can't imagine being married or – or sex – we're all right now, we haven't fallen into all those traps, I want to stay as I am now, not be in all that *mess*, you know what I mean." Sex is messy in the changes that it threatens; it is "all that roughness and disorder" (18) to the girls. Joan believes that the way the Andersons resist physical relationships is unhealthy. "Those girls are paralysed," she says of Louise's daughters, "they've become fairy-tale damsels" (11). As in a fairy tale, Joan proposes, "We need someone to come break the enchantment, someone from *elsewhere*" (12).

That someone turns out to be Peter Mir, a mysterious Russian gentleman with a bestial appearance who lives in a mansion at the edge of the city. He becomes embroiled

with the Andersons after a run-in with Lucas and Clement Graffe, brothers who are friends of Louise, in a "huge wild abandoned garden" (Murdoch, *Green* 84) where Lucas takes his brother one night, planning to kill him. (He has always resented that Clement was their parents' favourite.) Peter Mir receives a misdirected blow to the head from the baseball bat Lucas swings at his brother, and after his recovery in hospital, pursues Lucas with the intention of exacting "restitution" (104) for his suffering. Rather like the beast in the French tale, or the lion in the Grimms' "The Singing, Springing Lark," who flies into a rage when a traveller takes a bird from his garden, Mir tells Lucas, "You have wickedly wronged me, and you know it. I desire your punishment" (124). Restitution for a wrong committed is a theme in most animal-bridegroom tales. In the Russian tale "King Bear," the heroine and her brother are repeatedly threatened by the bear for repeated failings: "Your father and mother tried to cheat me, and in revenge I will eat you!" he says initially. When they try to escape the first time, he says, "Ah, so you wanted to flee from me; for that I will eat you up with all your little bones." Catching them again, he says, "Now I will really eat you." Each time, they manage to forestall their doom with promises of recompense.[11] Similarly, as "justice" (Murdoch, *Green*, 104) for being assaulted by Lucas, Peter Mir insists he be introduced to Louise's daughters, in relation to whom Lucas has acted as an unofficial guardian since their father's death. This is like the beast's insistence, in many versions of the fairy tale, that he be married to the transgressor's daughter as recompense. "I have been a successful man, but a lonely man" (128), says Peter Mir. "What I want, if I may be blunt, is love"

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[11] Aleksandr Afanasev, *Russian Fairy Tales*, trans. Norbert Guterman (1945; New York: Pantheon, 1973).

(130).

Descriptions of Peter Mir throughout the novel associate him with fairy-tale beasts. Being "broad-shouldered" and "solidly built" with "big powerful hands" and a "bulky" head with "wide nostrils," "thick lipped" with "curly hair" and "copious eyebrows" (Murdoch, *Green*, 103), Mir reminds characters in the novel of an animal. Clement imagines he is "a large animal, a boar perhaps, or even a buffalo," with "his glinting teeth appearing as out of dark fur" (124). Clement wonders, "Why does he look so like an animal?" (118). When he is introduced to Louise and her daughters, arriving at a costume party at the Andersons' wearing a giant buffalo head and joking with the youngest daughter, Moy, that the two of them are "beauty and the beast" (213), he inspires a combination of emotions – "dark fear and strange awful pity" (209) – in Moy, just as Clement had thought, "He is horrible, yet he is pathetic too" (125). Peter Mir's family motto is "strength obeys virtue" (230), and, if he invites comparison to a beast, there is something else behind this appearance, as is the case in animal-bridegroom tales. Louise thinks when she meets Mir, "he's some sort of great person who's been damaged" (205). Although he demands justice for Lucas's attempt to kill him, Mir is strangely polite about the matter, as the beast in animal-bridegroom tales – who is, after all, a prince in disguise – is often polite:

> 'All right,' said Mir, 'I'll go away. But I want to see you again soon.'
>
> 'I'm sorry,' said Lucas, 'that is not possible.'
>
> 'I think you can make it possible. May I be perfectly frank? I want something from you – and I propose to obtain it.'
>
> 'What?'

'Restitution.'

'What do you mean?'

'Sometimes called justice.' (104)

Clement observes of Peter Mir that "[h]e speaks so oddly, not like what one would expect" (98), and that he has a "deep liquid voice" with a "strange caressing accent" (191). Lucas says later, "I can't make him out, there's something wrong. He seems intelligent and cultivated, yet he's some sort of outsider, intruder" (118). Mir has "a certain presence, a certain air of authority" (104). Emboldened by his friendly contact with the Andersons, Mir arranges a re-enactment of Lucas's assault on him, saying that "a huge part of my personality has been blotted out" (250) by the accident and that he hopes this will return it to him. Accompanied by Clement and Lucas to the dark garden once more, Mir experiences a "metamorphosis" (300) where he remembers his religious faith, what he also calls "my moral consciousness" (306). Later, Louise's eldest daughter Aleph observes that "Peter is a complete person again. He has regained his whole nature, he's able to love and to forgive" (303). Dressed now in an expensive suit, Mir "looked extraordinarily youthful and full of energy, like a young man" (313).

Transformation is a central theme in *The Green Knight*. If Mir's metamorphosis does not have much to do with romantic love, his influence on other characters in the novel causes love to blossom among them. *The Green Knight* ends, like a novel by Charles Dickens, with a flurry of marriages. Characters who at the novel's start held the view that girls were "innocent lambs" (Murdoch, *Green* 10) and men were "beastly" (19), that sex was a "descent into bestial degradation" (72), end the novel in each other's arms. The Andersons' peaceful but stifling retreat is broken up by relationships with

men. Clement and Louise finally acknowledge their love for each other. Louise's eldest daughter, Aleph, elopes with Lucas. Joan reveals that she is engaged to a Texan named Humphrey H. Hook, whom her son Harvey had always assumed was an invention. The Andersons' friend Bellamy James, who had been experimenting with living in seclusion as "some sort of religious person" (1), even giving away his dog, ends up partnered with their friend Emil, whose relationship with another man has conveniently just ended. Louise's middle daughter, Sefton, falls in love with Joan's son Harvey, who had previously thought himself in love with her older sister. Making love, Harvey and Sefton are inspired by the strangeness of the experience to think of themselves as "monsters." Afterwards, Harvey says it is "as if I were living in a myth" (389). The lovers feel as if they have been "transformed" (391) into "divine beings" (390). In a sense they have, for according to Murdoch, loving another makes us into more than we were before. This lesson is only somewhat diminished in power by the fact that many of these relationships show questionable judgment, and that Harvey and Sefton's affair is particularly dubious, given that he only began to find Sefton attractive after her sister eloped with someone else. As we will see again in Chapter Five, love affairs, however misguided, remove characters from the solitude that beasts suffer in fairy tales – in their wild forests, lonely castles and neglected gardens – and force them into that relationship with the world that characterizes humanity.

In other novels by Murdoch, transformation is not desirable, for it is the beast in all of his strangeness who is attractive, not the prince he could become. The "alien essence" that Carter refers to in *Nights at the Circus*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, furnishes part of the attraction in marriages between animal bridegrooms and

human females, although the women may claim to be disgusted by the match. In the Italian tale, "The Canary Prince," the bride is actually more at ease with her groom's animal form than with his human side: "The princess couldn't resist picking up the beautiful canary and kissing him; then remembering he was a young man, she blushed" (Calvino, *Italian* 54). In Murdoch's *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), Rosa Keepe helps two Polish brothers recently arrived in England, ending up in a romantic triangle with them. Tutoring them in the English language, "[s]he felt like the princess whose strong faith releases the prince from an enchanted sleep, or from the transfigured form of a beast." But as the brothers adjust to their new surroundings, they lose their appeal somewhat for Rosa, "like the princess who remembers with a strange nostalgia the furry snout and fearful eyes which are now gone forever" (Murdoch, *Flight* 51). In *The Nice and the Good* (1968), Kate Gray compares Gavin Fivey, the mysterious Irish manservant of her bachelor friend John Ducane, to the fairy-tale beast, which she had always preferred to "the tediously handsome prince into which it had to be metamorphosed." Happily married, Kate nevertheless can not resist flirting with the "coarse and brutish" Fivey (Murdoch, *Nice* 153). In each case, the male's bestial aspect makes him attractive.

In Byatt's *Still Life* (1985) and *Babel Tower* (1996), Frederica Potter is drawn to Nigel Reiver because of his wealth, but it is less his money and what she might do with it that interests her than the exoticism it invests him with. Bored with Cambridge men, Frederica felt "the attraction of strangeness" when she met Nigel (Byatt, *Babel* 219). The heir to a family fortune and a country house, he carries "the authority of some code she didn't know" (327) when he orders for her in the expensive restaurants he treats her to. She feels she understands men at the college, but "what rules men like Nigel Reiver

worked to she had no knowledge of" (Byatt, *Still* 352). Arriving for a lunch date in a dark suit, Nigel looks "formidable, alien" (387), is "a foreign mystery" (388) to her. The morning after they first sleep together, Frederica "woke in a panic to unknown skin and the steady thud under her ear of unknown blood from an unknown heart" (391-392). Then she realizes it is Nigel who is in bed with her.

The appeal that a groom's strangeness has for a bride implicates her in the violence that is a feature of their union. The violence that marriage to a bear or lion threatens is compounded in animal-bridegroom tales by violent sequences typically preceding the prince's transformation. Tatar notes that while in some animal-bridegroom tales, kisses and tears disenchant the beast, in others, he is returned to his human form through a decapitation or similar act of violence. Thus, violence is not merely a threat in animal-bridegroom tales; in some cases, it drives the plot. Because the violent act is in a way an act of kindness, in that it permits the prince to return to his desirable, human form, Tatar proposes, "[t]enderness and violence are virtually wedded in these tales." They participate in "the weight of folkloric traditions that require an act of physical violence for love to flourish in its most human and humane form" (Tatar, *Hard* 175). In the Grimms' "Snow White and Rose Red," for example, two girls living in the forest with their widowed mother make friends with a bear who comes into their house every night to warm himself by the fire and to be caressed. A prince under enchantment, he regains his human form after he kills with "a single blow from his paw" a bad-tempered dwarf that has been harassing the girls. Subsequently, the prince marries Snow White, and Rose Red marries the prince's brother. The fact that the prince was once a killer does not make marriage to him less attractive.

In fact, these tales would seem to demand violence, in order for unions of male and female to take place. This theme is explored by American writer Joyce Carol Oates in her story, "The Buck" (*Heat and Other Stories*, 1991). In a narrative reminiscent of the Grimms' tale "Brother and Sister," Oates suggests that violence fails to resolve differences; rather, it can have tragic results. "Brother and Sister" is related to the animal-bridegroom cycle of fairy tales through the physical intimacy and deep affection of its protagonists, although in the tale they are blood relations. In Oates's story, an elderly woman living alone on an isolated farm struggles with a wounded buck that enters her house in its panic. A hunter has chased the deer and put a fifteen-inch steel crossbow arrow through its neck. The buck finally kills the woman by collapsing on her, and their bodies are discovered frozen together days later. As a young woman, Melanie had limited success winning attention from men, being a "plain, stubborn, sharp-tongued girl, eyes too large and stark and intelligent in her face to be 'feminine,' her body flat as a board" (Oates, "Buck" 154). Her brothers failed to appreciate her, lovers rejected her, and now she spends her days roaming the woods around her property, antagonizing male hunters. When the wounded buck appears in her yard, his twelve-point antlers showing "how astonishing the elegance of such male beauty, and the burden of it, God's design both playful and deadly shrewd" (166), he embodies the masculinity that Melanie has never been able to accommodate in her life, made especially powerful and dangerous. Melanie is crushed to death by the buck in its disoriented panic, in a struggle charged with sexual innuendo. She is depicted "sobbing as if her heart is broken, she's furious, trying to lift the heavy body from her, clawing at the body, raking her torn nails and bleeding fingers against the buck's thick winter coat, a coarse-haired furry coat, but the

buck's body will not budge" (167). When local authorities later come upon the scene, it is "[a]n astonishing sight: human and animal bodies virtually locked together in the rigor of death, their mingled blood so soaked into Melanie Snyder's clothes, so frozen, it is possible to separate them only by force" (168). A union has been effected at last between Melanie and the masculine world that she has alternately courted and antagonized throughout her life. If it is not a joyous union like that which marks the end of the Grimms' "Brother and Sister," Oates suggests that it is the only one possible.

Violence and sexuality are certainly intertwined in Frederica's relationship with Nigel. If he is mysterious to her at first, Frederica quickly gets to know Nigel well enough, by her account, to marry him. "I shall need a wife, to care for my house" (Byatt, *Still* 354), he says by way of a proposal, showing the limited perception of wives typical of the heroes of fairy tales. But Frederica does not yet see a cause for concern. Installed at Bran House, she is surprised to learn that Nigel really does expect her to be a housewife. He tells her, when she speculates on getting a job, "I would have thought you had a lot of things to do. There is a great deal here to occupy anyone" (Byatt, *Babel* 38). After the birth of their son Leo, Nigel becomes physically abusive towards Frederica. Their fights typically end in lovemaking. "I could kill you at any time, just like that" (96), Nigel warns her, as they look over the wrecked bedroom after one such fight. Strangely, Frederica does not appear to be concerned about the violence in her relationship; other factors, such as her desire for independence and a career as a writer, are at play when she makes her escape from her husband not long afterwards.

Byatt's novel addresses the extent to which Frederica is responsible for the violence in her marriage. The fairy-tale bride's willingness to put herself at risk in a

union with a savage male has troubled some readers. In Oates's story "The Buck," Melanie's treatment of the wounded deer is motivated by a peculiar combination of denial and anticipation: even as the buck charges her, "with a look of startled concern, she opens her arms to him." Just before it strikes her a fatal blow with its antlers, she considers that the buck is "beautiful even in dying" (Oates, "Buck" 167). Some versions of animal-bridegroom tales lessen the female's responsibility through plot devices. For example, the bride is usually obliged to marry because of a promise made previously to the beast, and generally not by her. In the French tale "Beauty and the Beast," Beauty is forced to live with the Beast because of a promise her father traded for his life when the Beast caught him picking a rose from the Beast's garden. In the Grimms' variant, "The Singing, Springing Lark," a bird is taken from the beast's garden, with the same result. British writer Angela Carter highlights the father's responsibility for the union in her story "The Tiger's Bride," when she shows him gambling his daughter away. "My father lost me to the Beast at cards" (Carter, "Tiger's" 61), Carter's story begins. In another animal-bridegroom tale, the Grimms' "Hans My Hedgehog," a princess is forced to marry a creature half-man, half-hedgehog when her father promises her hand in marriage in return for directions after he becomes lost in the forest. It is worth noting, however, that in "Beauty and the Beast" and "The Singing, Springing Lark," the object obtained from the beast's garden has been requested by Beauty herself, so that in a way, it could be argued that the marriage is a result of her desires.

Frederica's relationship with Nigel bears certain similarities with animal-bridegroom tales, but it is explicitly compared to the Grimms' "Bluebeard," which scholars have identified as another tale in that cycle. Maria Tatar suggests that

"Bluebeard" be considered in close association with the cycle of animal-bridegroom tales, since the blue-bearded gentleman with a secret room full of dismembered former wives is "a beast in all but the literal sense of the term" (Tatar, *Hard* 156). Bruno Bettelheim points out that, in some Russian and Scandinavian versions of the tale of a husband who forbids a wife access to a secret chamber, the husband is a beast, suggesting a further connection between "Bluebeard" and animal-bridegroom tales (Bettelheim 299). Another tale of a bride who learns after her marriage that her husband is a murderer is the Grimms' "The Robber Bridegroom," and the groom's name in a British variant of that tale, "Mr. Fox," also invites comparison with animal-bridegroom tales. (Whether or not the protagonist is actually a fox is not made clear in the tale.) If animal-bridegroom tales do not always moderate the bride's responsibility for marrying a fierce or repulsive beast, the Grimms' tales "Bluebeard" and "The Robber Bridegroom," wherein women agree to marry obviously inappropriate men, are especially problematic.

The earliest known version of the story of the murderous husband with the blue beard is Perrault's "Bluebeard," or "La barbe bleue," which appeared in his collection, *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* (1697). A variant of the tale with the same name was included in the Grimms' first edition, although the brothers later eliminated the tale on the grounds that it showed too many signs of its French origins (Tatar, *Hard* 157). A similar tale, "Fitcher's Bird," has remained in the Grimms' collection. Debates have arisen concerning the possibility that Perrault invented the tale of Bluebeard, but Iona and Peter Opie argue that as there are several "obvious gaps" in the narrative, and as it has the feeling of "a legend imperfectly recalled," featuring none of the magic typical of Perrault (apart from the mysteriously stained key), one could conclude that, "[a]lthough

no earlier telling of the tale has been discovered, it may be taken for granted that one existed" (Opies 133). One might also draw this conclusion from the number of variants of the tale available in other traditions. Stories where protagonists are given access to many rooms but one, and cannot resist exploring it, also appear in Giambatista Basile's *Pentamerone* (1635) and in *The Arabian Nights*. However, in the *Pentamerone* a princess is tested by an ogress – a creature of her own sex – while in *The Arabian Nights*, a prince is tested. The Opies note that "a considerable cycle of tales, including stories in French, German, Norwegian, Icelandic, Gaelic, Basque, Italian and Greek, all involving forbidden chambers," have been "usefully analysed" (Opies 134).

In the Grimms' variant of "Bluebeard," a widower raises a daughter and three sons. The daughter is urged by her father to marry the blue-bearded local king, when he arrives one day in a golden coach drawn by six horses and asks for her hand. She is reluctant to marry him but her father is dazzled by the king's wealth – the bride's family is not, apparently, "of high degree" as in the French version of the tale by Charles Perrault. After their marriage, Bluebeard departs on a journey and entrusts his new bride with the keys to every room in the house, forbidding her to use only a small golden key which opens a room he does not want her to enter. While he is away, the bride explores the house until nothing is left but the forbidden room, whereupon her curiosity prompts her to disobey her husband and use the small golden key. It opens on a bloody chamber with "dead women hanging all along the walls." She drops the key in her surprise, and it becomes stained with blood. Her husband returns, asks for the keys, and discovers his bride's transgression by means of the stain. He prepares to kill his bride, but she bargains for time to pray. While Bluebeard sharpens his knife, the bride goes upstairs and calls for

her brothers through the window. They are "sitting in the forest and drinking some cool wine" when they hear her cries for help. They come to her rescue, killing Bluebeard and hanging him up in the bloody room, "next to the women he had killed." While the French tale concludes with the bride making another, more fortunate marriage, in the Grimms' variant she returns home to her family, with her husband's money.

Bluebeard's wealth aligns the story even more closely with the animal-bridegroom tales: the bridegroom's difference from the bride furnishes a great part of his appeal to her. "No one knew who Mr. Fox was," says the narrator of the British tale, "but he was certainly brave, and surely rich,"[12] and it is Bluebeard's lavish spending, in the Perrault tale, on "a constant round of picnics, hunting and fishing expeditions, dances, dinners and luncheons," that persuades the originally reluctant bride that he is "exceedingly agreeable." The heroine of the Grimms' "Bluebeard," before she becomes a victim of her curiosity and enters the forbidden chamber, enjoys spending her days in her husband's absence going from room to room in his house and examining his "treasures and magnificent things." But it may not be the groom's wealth in itself which is being highlighted in these passages; rather, the degree to which his wealth sets him apart makes him interesting to the heroine. This is how Nigel's wealth initially appealed to Byatt's Frederica, lending him "the attraction of strangeness" (Byatt, *Babel* 219) when she first met him.

After they are married and have a young son, Leo, Frederica finds a locked suitcase of sadomasochistic pornography in Nigel's closet while he is away, a discovery

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[12] Katherine Briggs, *British Folktales* (New York: Pantheon, 1970) 87.

later compared to "Bluebeard's cupboard" (Byatt, *Babel* 493) in divorce court. When she examines the images of tortured bodies, she sees them as if they were in pieces: "So much flesh, so very stretched over such muscles, such globes, so much clean, silky, peachy skin with a high gloss on it. Such damp holes laid bare, such glistening prongs, such pearly teeth" (103). As it does for the heroines of the fairy tales, the discovery of the "cupboard" marks a turning point for Frederica; although her husband has been violent with her and she has stayed in the marriage, the pornography collection confirms Nigel's dangerous association of violence with sex. Finally, she is really alarmed about her relationship with her husband. "It is like finding trunks of butchered limbs, she tells herself wildly, hands and feet under the floorboards, I cannot manage to pretend I haven't seen" (103). Nigel and Frederica have a violent quarrel when he returns, and chasing her across the lawn of Bran House, his moated country estate, Nigel throws an axe at Frederica and cuts her on the hip and thigh, her nightdress reddening quickly with blood. He apologizes as he has for his violence in the past, but once she has recovered, Frederica makes her escape in earnest, fleeing with her son one night into the woods surrounding the property. There, rather as the brothers of Bluebeard's bride come to her rescue, male friends from Frederica's university days are waiting with a vehicle to carry her away.

Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's prose poem "Alien Territory" (*Good Bones* 1992) addresses the apparent eagerness of Bluebeard's wife to endanger herself, marrying a man who, in Perrault's version, is known to have had previous wives – "and no one knew what had become of them." Atwood's narrator relates, "Believe it or not, this sister was in love with him, even though she knew he was a serial killer." Atwood ignores the fact that in both the French and German versions of "Bluebeard," a parent of

the bride arranges the marriage; in Perrault's tale, the mysterious gentleman with the blue beard asks to marry into a family with two daughters, "leaving it to their mother to choose which should be bestowed upon him," while in the Grimms' version of the story, the bride's father accepts a marriage proposal on his daughter's behalf, and although she resists the idea, "her father kept urging her, and finally she consented." This intervention by a parent may be incidental: in a variant on "Bluebeard," the Grimms' tale, "Fitcher's Bird," the homicidal groom – here a wizard – steals three daughters from their home one after the other, with no one's consent. In Perrault's version, moreover, if the daughters initially must be urged by their mother to entertain Bluebeard's suits, in time, the younger daughter begins to find him "an exceedingly agreeable man." In the Grimms' "The Robber Bridegroom," a young woman is promised in marriage to a mysterious suitor by her father, although she "did not love him the way a bride-to-be should love her bridegroom, nor did she trust him." But in the British tale "Mr. Fox" (also known as "Mr. Fox's Courtship" or "The Cellar of Blood"), which is very similar to "The Robber Bridegroom," the bride finds her suitor "brave" and "gallant" and we are told that "of all her lovers, Lady Mary cared for him alone." As is the case with animal-bridegroom tales, therefore, women in "Bluebeard" and associated tales are not always forced into their unions with dangerous men.

"Be Bold, Be Bold, But Not Too Bold," reads a sign on the door to the bloody chamber in "Mr. Fox," and the question of whether these heroines fail to show appropriate caution in their love affairs, and why, has interested contemporary writers responding to fairy tales. The narrator of Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's prose poem about Bluebeard, "Alien Territory" (*Good Bones* 1992), wonders why women are

invariably attracted to dangerous men: "Those ones. Why do women like them? They have nothing to offer, none of the usual things." She concludes that the attraction to these men is mostly sexual – "They say the worst things you have ever dreamed. They open locked doors." Nigel's "cupboard" of pornography reflects another dimension of the tale of "Bluebeard," which is that, if the story concerns curiosity and its results, it is also about sex. Maria Tatar proposes that, although perceptions of the fairy tale have changed, at its heart, it is still "a tale of high adventure charged with sexual meaning" (Tatar, *Hard* 178). Freudian scholars such as Bruno Bettelheim have, not surprisingly, identified the locked room full of women's bodies, the key inserted in the keyhole, and the egg with which the husband entrusts his bride, in lieu of a key, in the Grimms' variant "Fitcher's Bird," as sexual symbols. Bettelheim proposes that the secret Bluebeard guards from his bride is a sexual mystery that she might do better not to explore; this is a tale, he concludes, about "the destructive aspects of sex" (Bettelheim 301). Maria Tatar agrees that "with its emphasis on forbidden chambers, its movement from curiosity to revulsion, its focus on the 'spectacular' moment rather than on the actual act of violence and violation," the tale of "Bluebeard" is "likely to be addressing fears about violence, death and sexuality" (Tatar, *Hard* 171).

The violence that is threatened by the animal bridegroom may generate emotions other than fear in the bride. In British writer Angela Carter's story "The Bloody Chamber," the seventeen-year-old pianist daughter of a French widow marries a Marquis previously married several times. Their story imitates that of "Bluebeard," with the bride entering a forbidden room in her husband's absence to discover the bodies of his previous wives. After a narrow escape, the girl marries a blind piano tuner she met at the

Marquis's castle, relieved that he can not see the red mark on her forehead where the Marquis pressed the bloodied key that was the sign of her transgression. She feels that this mark represents "my shame" (Carter, "Bloody" 46), and indeed, Carter's story holds the bride responsible, to a degree, for the danger that she experienced in her marriage. It is true that the Marquis was mysterious to her: his face "seemed to [her] like a mask," and she wondered if "elsewhere, I might see him plain" (4). But it can not be said that she entered innocently into marriage. It is clear that she married the Marquis not out of love, but out of greed: "He was rich as Croesus," she gloated, and, dressed in the gowns and jewels he gave her, she found that "[o]n his arm, all eyes were upon me" (6). She was also attracted by the degree of cruelty that she suspected in him. Her husband says that her face has a "promise of debauchery only a connoisseur could detect" (19). Although she felt "a sharp premonition of dread" when he looked at her, she says, "I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away" (7).

There may be something similar at work in Frederica's relationship with Nigel. Later she will say that she felt she had to remain with him for the sake of their child, but Frederica's weird calmness when Nigel attacks her (she locks herself in the bathroom and reads poetry), and the fact that their fights always resolve themselves in lovemaking, leave the reader wondering whether her husband's violence initially appealed to Frederica on some level. Looking over the bedroom after one of their fights, Frederica jokes with Nigel, "It looks like the scene of a murder" (Byatt, *Babel* 95). He replies, "I could have killed you. I learned unarmed combat in the Commandos, doing my National Service" (96). The reader wonders why Frederica is not more alarmed by statements such as this. But then, the fact that he is "dark and a little sullen-looking" (Byatt, *Still*

313) has always been a factor in her attraction to him.

Safe in London with Leo, employed now as a teacher and a reader for a publishing company, Frederica, in filing divorce proceedings against Nigel, has the opportunity to look back on her marriage and consider that she may have shared responsibility for its problems. Not only do some variants of "Bluebeard" suggest that the bride should have known better than to wed the mysterious stranger with the murky past, but some versions – Perrault's, most famously – emphasize the bride's disobedience of her husband as the central transgression in the story. Maria Tatar has protested against a common response of scholars to the tale of "Bluebeard," which is to see it as a warning about excessive curiosity and its effects on a marriage. This reading, she points out, turns "a tale depicting the most brutal kind of serial murders into a story about idle female curiosity and duplicity," and invites us to view the heroine's "quite legitimate" curiosity as a "perversion." Tatar considers that Bluebeard's multiple crimes "do not succeed in deflecting attention from the heroine's single transgression," which "functions as the chief source of evil" (Tatar, *Hard* 161). She wonders why "everyone seems to agree on the wrong message" (165). It is a message, nevertheless, which interests Byatt. While Frederica's curiosity about Nigel's suitcase of pornography has, in a way, a positive effect, in that it leads to her removal from a dangerous situation, the author shows an interest in exploring, as Atwood and Carter have done, the woman's admittedly lesser responsibility for a relationship which turns violent.

Atwood's short story "Bluebeard's Egg" (*Bluebeard's Egg*, 1983) suggests that men who hurt women are harder to spot in real life than they are in fairy tales. Discussing fairy tales in an evening literature class, the protagonist, Sally, had proposed

that the dismembered bodies of Bluebeard's previous wives were "too obvious," and that it would have been better "to have the curious woman open the door and find nothing there at all" (Atwood, "Bluebeard's" 158). But Sally has failed to take her own lesson about concealed treachery to heart; at a dinner party she realizes that her husband Ed has been having an affair with her best friend Marylynn for some time. Atwood's novel *Bodily Harm* (1981), originally titled *The Robber Bridegroom,* also suggests that inappropriate men are seldom as obviously inappropriate in real life as they are in fairy tales. In the novel, Rennie Wilford, a Toronto food and fashion journalist and "expert on surfaces" (Atwood, *Bodily* 26), falls in love on a Caribbean vacation with an American who charters out boats to tourists, only discovering that he is a smuggler and a political instigator when his activities land her in a Third World jail. Paul is not the first dangerous man Rennie has been with, but her experience with him finally teaches her to subject her lovers to closer scrutiny. Innocently engaged in conversation by a man sitting next to her on the plane home, Rennie "wonders if he really is who he says he is," and she realizes that "she'll wonder that about everybody now" (300).

Although characters revealing themselves to be something other than they seemed is a common feature of fairy tales, as Maria Tatar has observed, in animal-bridegroom tales, not even the human characters can be trusted. It is as if, in the world described by these stories, no man can be taken for granted by a woman. Tatar says that in these tales, "father figures invariably personify the sweet voice of reason, wisdom and prudence" but "end by delivering their daughters up to a ferocious beast in order to save their own lives." Meanwhile, beastly husbands "are not quite so savage as they appear at first blush" (Tatar, *Hard* 173). Tatar notes that the first part of the Grimms' "The Singing,

Springing Lark," which focuses on the meeting of the father with the lion, emphasizes their differences. The father "embodies paternal authority in its benevolent form," while the beast "must be seen as the very incarnation of coercive rage and violence." "I'll eat him up," the lion threatens the trespasser who has not, after all, caused him much harm, taking a little bird from his magnificent garden. While his servant cowers in the bushes, "very scared," the father calmly reasons with the lion, saying, "I didn't know that the bird belonged to you," and then arranges his daughter's marriage as if it were a minor business transaction. Tatar notes that, in some variants, the devil replaces the beast (172). "The contrast between the civilized face of paternal good will and the savage visage of beastly malice could not be more strikingly marked," she says. But the father ultimately betrays his daughter, proving himself less of a gentleman than the beast after all. Meanwhile, the fierce lion makes "a handsome husband" to the heroine, who considers that she is "well off" in the match. In the Grimms' "Hans My Hedgehog," the princess who marries a hedgehog is apprehensive about her wedding night, being "quite afraid of his quills," but in bed her husband turns into "a handsome young man" who soon puts her in "a joyful mood."

Frederica is surprised to discover her husband's resemblance to Bluebeard, but later she wonders if she should not have detected it earlier. She tells the lawyer who is petitioning for her divorce that the cruellest thing Nigel did to her was to stop her from working. "It stopped me from being myself," she tells him. Begbie dryly responds, "Marriage is expected to have that effect" (Byatt, *Babel* 323). Frederica begins to consider that she may have entered marriage with false expectations. "I thought all the other parts of myself could go on being what they were," she thinks (385). Looking back,

Frederica realizes that she can not blame anyone for "making me marry Nigel" (384). Even though his violence drove her out of the marital home, "The real wrong, Frederica thinks, was hers, was done by her in marrying him when she did not wholly want to, when she could not go through with it" (238). She did not think the matter through enough, but got married "because it solved the problem of whether to get married" (326). She considers, "I thought the sex was good, was satisfactory, which is better than good, and I think I thought that because he was rich, I wouldn't have to a be a housewife like my mother." She concludes gloomily, "I deserved what I got" (385).

While she is undergoing divorce proceedings, Frederica keeps a journal, pasting into it fragments of divorce documents cut up and stuck together so they produce a different, often ironic meaning, and stories from the news and from her own life that suggest she is preoccupied with dismemberment. This reflects the feelings that she is experiencing, in the dissolution of her marriage, that her life has been torn apart, as it also reflects a clearer view she has now of her husband and his treatment of her. She writes down a story she overheard about a woman trying to cut her wrists with a bacon-slicer. She describes going to get her hair cut, and feeling that she is being assaulted: the hairdresser hurts her with the scissors, and she "is almost sure that the small hurts are deliberately inflicted" (Byatt, *Babel* 389). Thinking of Nigel reading her petition for divorce, Frederica sees him as Bluebeard: "She imagines Nigel's dark face, looking down on the foolscap pages . . . . She imagines rage. Nigel's face becomes that of a blue-black demon." Contemplating this image, "[s]he crosses her own arms defensively across her breasts" (323). However, there is finally a place in the novel where fairy tales and real life diverge. Frederica has another impression of Nigel as "like a demon . . . blue-black

and electric," but when she meets him with their lawyers, she realizes that he is "a whole, living, complicated human being, not a demon" (335). Frederica's attitudes about the marriage have made Nigel, who is without doubt a violent man, look like a worse monster than he is. In the Grimms' version of "Bluebeard," the heroine after her scare returns home to her father's house with her husband's fortune. But Byatt's Frederica Potter, in her new awareness that she shares responsibility for her bad marriage, receives a much more dubious inheritance from Nigel.

Drabble's references to animal-bridegroom tales in *The Waterfall* (1969) are also charged with ambivalence. In Drabble's novel *The Radiant Way* (1987), it is made clear that when transformations occur inside a marriage, they are for the worse. Psychiatrist Liz Headleand contemplates "the hideous transformation which overcomes the partners of a bad marriage." Previously divorced, with her second marriage now on the verge of collapse, Liz sees marriage as precipitating changes in the opposite direction to what the fairy tales propose: unhappily married people "grow fangs and horns and sprout black monstrous wolfish hair," she thinks, they "claw and cling and bite and suck" (Drabble, *Radiant* 13). Drabble's novel proposes that marriage might actually have a degenerative effect on the partners involved. In *The Waterfall*, animal-bridegroom tales illuminate the woman changing in a relationship, not the man, and although the changes are beneficial to her, the nature of the romance calls the novel's fairy-tale happy ending into question.

The Waterfall, rich in fairy-tale allusions, describes the love affair between Jane Gray, a poet who has stopped writing, and her cousin's husband, James, and the transforming effect it has on her life – among other things, returning her desire to write. When a car accident plunges James into a coma, his wife Lucy confronts Jane and reveals

that she does not love James anymore and has been having an affair of her own. After his recovery, she divorces him, leaving James and Jane in each other's arms. But this convenient fairy-tale ending occurs after Jane has already felt the transforming effects of her love affair. Staying in a hotel in the town where James is hospitalized, Jane hears a fairy tale recounted on a children's program playing in the TV room. In the tale, a woman pleads with her enchanted lover, "Will you not wake and turn to me?" It mirrors her nursing her unconscious lover so powerful that Jane says, "I stood there transfixed" (Drabble, *Waterfall* 198). In the Grimms' "The Singing, Springing Lark," a more circuitous narrative than the French tale, "Beauty and the Beast," the bride must wake her husband, who is a lion by day and a man at night, from an enchanted sleep, rather as Beauty at the end of the French tale must restore his health with her tears. "Are you going to forget me forever?" she pleads with him in the Grimms' version. James later recovers, and freed from his wife, he and Jane continue as lovers.

Even better, being brought close to death also restores Jane's ability to write poetry, so that it is as if she has undergone the transformation. In *The Waterfall*, therefore, Drabble shows that there are ways of approaching animal-bridegroom tales that mitigate the focus on accommodating women that other writers have responded to in those stories. However, there is an ambivalence in Drabble's use of fairy tales to illuminate her protagonist's experiences in this novel. One could note, for example, that it is not the relationship itself that inspires Jane to write again, but its threatened ending, when James is lying near death. At the start of *The Waterfall*, Jane is clearly overwhelmed by her passion for James. "He changed me forever and I am now what he made" (Drabble, *Waterfall* 229), she says. Far from liberating her, the love affair could

have been one of the things keeping her from writing. The fact that Jane begins to write when she feels she is losing James suggests that she is already preparing herself to get on with her life. "I wrote a very good sequence of poems while James was in hospital," Jane muses near the novel's end. "I have been writing better ever since that episode" (233). This possibility is reinforced by the detailed sequence in which, upon her return to London, Jane cleans out her house, "which had clearly been inhabited by vagrants" (224) in her absence. There is a way in which James has been inhabiting her, in the course of their affair, although at the end of the novel she seems to have taken charge of herself again. She ends the novel with James, saying, "I knew we would never be able to part" (230), but she does not sound particularly happy about the fact. That her writing is what she is really excited about now is reinforced by the postmodern ending, where Jane plays with possible conclusions to the novel.

It should be noted that there are a few animal brides in fairy tales. Bettelheim points out that, although male beasts are often repugnant, animal brides, when they appear in fairy tales, are nearly always lovely, which suggests that, "to achieve a happy union, it is the female who has to overcome her view of sex as loathsome" (Bettelheim 285). The evidence would seem to dispute this, however. In a Russian version of the Grimms' "The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich" called "The Frog Princess," the youngest of three sons must endure a frog for a wife, when she returns the arrow he shot into the world:

> His brothers were joyous and happy, but Prince Ivan became thoughtful and wept: 'How will I live with a frog? After all, this is a life task, not like wading across a river or walking across a field!' He wept and wept, but there was no way out of

it, so he took the frog to wife. All three sons and their brides were wed in accordance with the customs of their country; the frog was held on a dish. (Afanasev)

Fortunately, the frog turns out to be a princess in disguise. In the Swedish tale, "The Rats in the Juniper Bush," a prince who is unhappy about taking home a rat for a wife – "he'd rather have returned without any fiancee at all than with a rat"[13] – is pleased to witness her changing into a beautiful princess. In the Grimms' "The Singing, Springing Lark," the young woman at the centre of the tale has to contend not only with a husband who takes on a lion's form in the day and a man's form at night, but she must also defend him from the romantic advances of a wicked princess who sometimes appears as a dragon. Lovelier animal brides appear elsewhere. A lady takes the form of a cat in the Grimms' "The Poor Miller's Apprentice." In the Grimms' tale "The Raven," a sorceress who finds her daughter a nuisance turns her into a raven, and the heroine must be rescued from enchantment by the hero. Similarly, in the Italian tale "The Dove Girl," the king of Spain's daughter, who has been transformed into a dove, marries the hero who breaks her enchantment.

Moreover, in some tales, it is the bride's violence which releases the bridegroom from his bestial enchantment. Instead of the female having to accommodate the male, as in the animal-bridegroom tales we know best, she beats on him until he turns into something she likes better. In the Grimms' "The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich," a princess

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[13] Lone Thygesen Blecher and George Blecher, ed., *Swedish Folktales and Legends* (New York: Pantheon, 1993) 250.

promises a frog affection if he retrieves her ball from a well, but then responds violently to the frog's insistence he rest in her bed: "This made the princess extremely angry, and after she picked him up, she threw him against the wall with all her might. 'Now you can have your rest, you nasty frog!' However, when he fell to the ground, he was no longer a frog but a prince with kind and beautiful eyes." Tatar notes that in Scottish and Gaelic versions of "The Frog King," the princess beheads her suitor. In a Polish variant, the bridegroom is a snake and the princess tears him in two. A Lithuanian text requires the burning of the snake's skin before he is transformed (Tatar, *Hard* 174). In the Swedish tale, "The Serpent Prince," the industrious bride tears off her husband's snake skin and scrubs his "bloody, dripping flesh" (Blecher 224) with lye and brushes until he turns into a more acceptable human husband. In the Swedish tale "Prince Faithful," the heroine chops off a horse's head in order to turn him into a prince (Blecher).

As Drabble does in *The Waterfall*, Angela Carter proposes an alternative course to holding the female responsible for reconciliation in bestial marriages. In Carter's modern fairy tale, "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," a young woman wedded to a lion is troubled by his ferocious appearance, but the lion, in turn, is troubled by his bride. In a "curious reversal, she frightened him" and if she is "[f]ascinated, almost awed" by her mate's appearance, it seemed "as if he himself were in awe." The lion may, in fact, be more frightened of his bride than she is of him, so that he must "force himself to master his shyness, which was that of a wild creature" (Carter, "Lyon" 54). When the beast is transformed at the end of the story, his appearance is not radically altered, so that he takes the shape of "a man with an unkempt mane of hair and, how strange, a broken nose, such as the noses of retired boxers, that gave him a distant, heroic resemblance to the

handsomest of all the beasts" (60). This suggests that what the bride has had to accommodate herself to is not so different from what a human partner would have offered. In Carter's "The Tiger's Bride," meanwhile, roles are reversed completely – the beast licks away his human bride's skin to expose an animal's fur. "The tiger will never lie down with the lamb," the bride recognizes, "he acknowledges no pact that is not reciprocal. The lamb must learn to run with the tigers" (Carter, "Tiger's" 79). In this story, instead of transforming her spouse's bestial nature through love, or reconciling herself to it through patience and self-sacrifice, the bride puts aside her humanity in order to be married. A wry comment on normal human marriage may or may not be implicit.

Sex leads to "dangerous and distressing things," Harvey's friend Tessa warns him in Murdoch's *The Green Knight*. "Sex means anxiety, fear, servitude" (Murdoch, *Green* 132). Scottish writer Anne Fine's novel *The Killjoy* (1986) tells of a young student's affair with her disfigured political science professor, Ian Laidlaw, whose cruelty in bed does not serve as sufficient warning to Alica Dawe that he is "an ugly man, inside and out" (Fine 182) – the novel ends with Ian tying Alicia to his bed, mutilating and killing her. "Life is no fairytale," Ian tells the police, "and this was not a story of Beauty and the Beast, with their eventual triumph over ugliness" (188). Romances with beasts can be risky, as Frederica Potter learns in Byatt's *Still Life* and *Babel Tower*. After her divorce from Nigel and a few failed attempts at relationships with other men, Frederica concludes that she is happiest in her own company: "separateness" is a "strength," Frederica has determined, and "I am a separate being" (Byatt, *Babel* 314). Meanwhile, the benefits of romantic and sexual love receive greater acknowledgment in Murdoch's *The Green Knight*, where characters who have suffered as a result of the very

separateness that Frederica craves find ways of breaking the habit of solitude and bringing love into their lives. Although some of the unions that end the novel show questionable judgment, they have the effect of strongly connecting characters who were previously isolated with the network of obligations to others which Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt have said characterizes a moral world. And although it is true that love may sometimes involve servitude, as Tessa warned Harvey in Murdoch's novel, in different circumstances it might offer the freedom that Drabble's Jane Gray discovers in *The Waterfall*. "A question of faith, it had been," Jane considers, "but faith not justified by its object: love, human love. And for this supposed love and its dim priorities they had risked, childishly, her life and his" (Drabble, *Waterfall* 202). Whether the love matters as much as what it brings Jane, in the return of her ability to write, is left open to interpretation in Drabble's novel. Nevertheless, according to these writers, the risks involved in falling in love are worth taking, because those who love successfully will find themselves strongly connected with the human world, while the less fortunate will obtain a clearer sense of their vulnerabilities – yet another aspect of being human.

Chapter Four

"Briar Rose" I

Throughout Iris Murdoch's novels, there is a recurring sequence wherein one person discovers another asleep, and falls in love with them, or feels an existing love confirmed. The scenes are strangely similar: typically, the room is dimly lit, the sleeper's hair is spread on the pillow and one arm is flung outwards. Consider the following:

> Rosalind was lying half undressed upon her bed, she had evidently been too tired to get herself into bed. One long leg was showing, one distraught arm stretched out across the pillow, her head thrown back, her soft golden hair spread upon the pillow. He heard her soft breathing. (Murdoch, *Jackson's* 139)

> Julian, in a mauve-and-white flowered petticoat with a white fringe, was lying on the bed deeply asleep. Her glowing brown hair was spread all over the pillow and half over her face in a silky network like part of a beautiful shawl. She lay on her back with her throat exposed as if to the knife. (Murdoch, *Black* 267)

> She lay on her back upon a reddish brownish surface which Edward took at first to be a sheet or quilt, but which he now saw to be her undone hair. The ribbons which she had woven into her plaits earlier in the evening also appeared here and there among the tresses. Her head was a little turned to one side and tilted back, with a hand and forearm twisted in behind it, in an attitude which might have expressed anguish had not her sleep set a seal of peace upon it. The other arm lay

outstretched upon the disordered blanket with the palm open in a gesture of acquiescence or submission. (Murdoch, *Apprentice* 299)

The little door of the sedan-chair had been pulled to. Moy gently opened it, revealing Harvey as near to being curled into a ball as it is possible for a human to be. His eyes were closed, he was breathing quietly, his fair glossy curly hair had spread itself out upon the cushions like a halo, one hand, extended towards his chin, held a strand of hair, straightening it out. His face was benign and calm. (Murdoch, *Green* 362)

Monty squatted down beside David and examined him carefully . . . . The light golden hair was tangled, drawn forward over the brow perhaps by the distraught hand, which now lay open, palm upward, upon the sofa, as if imploring. The other hand was clenched upon the knee, the shoulder exposed. (Murdoch, *Sacred* 215-216)

He could see nothing, but after a while he began to hear the soft sound of Lisa's sleeping breath . . . . He could see the whiteness of the bed now and very dimly discern the shape of her head and the dark hair fanned out upon the pillow. She was lying on her back, one arm outstretched upon the counterpane. (Murdoch, *Bruno's* 160)

Another shared element made explicit or implied in these sequences is the emotion of the onlooker. In *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, Monty puts his arms around the

sleeping teenager, David, the golden-haired son of his neighbours. In *The Good Apprentice*, Edward feels "an excitement composed of power and gentleness" (Murdoch, *Apprentice* 299) as he watches his half-sister Ilona sleep. In *Bruno's Dream*, Miles is transported by the sight of his wife's sister in bed: "The violent pounding of his heart was making him feel sick and faint . . . . He was trembling so violently that his fingernails scratched the sheet with a tearing sound. Uttering a sighing groan he fell on his knees" (Murdoch, *Bruno's* 160). Whatever is going on in these sequences, it obviously has great meaning for those involved. The ancient story of the sleeping princess – the Grimms call her "Briar Rose" – has invited a range of interpretations. In British writer Angela Carter's novel *Nights at the Circus* (1994), Sleeping Beauty is four things at once: the novel's heroine, Fevvers, a raunchy, Cockney circus acrobat with wings; Jack Walser, an American journalist writing her story; the city of St. Petersburg; and a prostitute with sleeping sickness employed by the evil Madame Schreck, whose brothel caters to "those who were troubled in their . . . souls."[14] For Murdoch, however, the most obvious interpretation is the most powerful: for her, the tale points out the difficult way to true love. Although characters are quick to fall in love in Murdoch's novels, true love for her is not easy to attain, for loving someone truly in Murdoch's universe means simultaneously seeing them clearly and respecting their separateness from oneself.

"La Belle au bois dormant" ("The sleeping Beauty in the woods") was the first tale in French folklorist and fairy-tale author Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du*

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[14] Carter, *Nights*, 57. Page number references for comparisons to Sleeping Beauty are, in the order stated, 39, 222, 97, Chapter Four.

temps passé (1697). Historians Iona and Peter Opie argue that the Grimm brothers' version, "Dornroschen," or "Briar Rose," also known as "Little Briar Rose," was "undoubtedly derived from Perrault's text, however reluctant the Grimms were to recognize it" (Opies 102). But the story of the sleeping princess existed long before Perrault wrote down his version. Variants appear in Italian Giambatista Basile's *Pentamerone* (1636); in the Arabian story of Sittukan, where a flax filament under the heroine's fingernail puts her to sleep; in the fourteenth-century French romance *Perceforest*, printed in France in 1528; and even in the story of Bynhild in the twelfth-century Scandinavian prose epic the *Volsunga Saga*, where Odin, acting on Brynhild's own wishes that she marry only a courageous man, puts her to sleep in a castle surrounded by a wall of flame, from whence she is subsequently rescued by the heroic Sigurd, who rides through the fire.

In the Grimms' "Briar Rose," a king and queen celebrate the birth of a long-wished-for daughter with a great feast. Because they do not have enough plates, they neglect to invite one of the kingdom's thirteen "wise women." The slighted wise woman arrives after eleven of the others have given their gifts, and has her revenge by cursing the child: "In her fifteenth year the princess shall prick herself with a spindle and fall down dead!" The twelfth wise woman, who has not yet given her gift, does not have the power to reverse the curse, but is able to modify it: "The princess shall not die," she says. "Instead, she shall fall into a deep sleep for one hundred years." As Briar Rose grows up, the king has all the spindles in his kingdom destroyed, but neglects the one in a tower room in the castle which the princess discovers one afternoon in her wanderings. Briar Rose sees an old woman spinning, touches the spindle, and falls into an enchanted sleep

as was prophesied. The whole palace also falls asleep, and a briar hedge grows around it, obscuring it from view. Stories are told about the beautiful sleeping princess, and many princes arrive and try to break through the briar hedge to rescue her, but die trapped in the thorns. A prince arriving on the day that the hundred-year curse expires finds that the hedge is full of flowers, and that it opens to let him in. He discovers Briar Rose asleep in the small tower room, admires her beauty, and kisses her. The princess awakens, along with the rest of the palace, and marries the prince.

A common interpretation of the story is that it describes a sexual awakening. Ruth Bottigheimer notes that, in early editions of the Grimms' tale, Briar Rose is simply said to fall down in a deep sleep, but that, by the end of the collection's history, she was positioned on a bed, enhancing her sexual availability. The later edition reads, "The very moment she felt the prick, she fell down on the bed that was standing there, and she was overcome by a deep sleep." Discussing fairy-tale illustrations, Bottigheimer observes that the occasionally chaste depiction of Briar Rose resting on her side or sitting in an armchair when the prince arrives "shocks the viewer into a sudden recognition of how she has been made to look sexually available by generations of illustrators" (Bottigheimer 164). The kiss that the prince bestows in the Grimms' version is more than the French tale allows; Perrault's princess awakens when the prince merely looks at her admiringly. But the kiss is also less physical contact than what some earlier versions of the story describe. In Basile's *Pentamerone*, as in the medieval French *Perceforest*, the sleeping maiden is raped by her suitor:

> At last he came to the saloon, and when the king beheld Talia, who seemed as one ensorcelled, he believed that she slept, and he called her, but she remained

> insensible, and crying aloud, he felt his blood course hotly through his veins in contemplation of so many charms; and he lifted her up in his arms, and carried her to a bed, whereon he gathered the first fruits of love, and leaving her upon the bed, returned to his own kingdom, where, in the pressing business of his realm, he for a time thought no more of this incident. (as qtd. in Zipes, *Brothers* 151)

Still asleep, the heroine gives birth to twins, who are looked after by fairies, but nursed at her breast. She awakens when one of the babies sucks out the thorn that caused her enchanted sleep. Awake, Talia has to defend herself against the homicidally jealous wife of her children's father before this peculiar family can be reunited.

The tale's association of female sexuality with passivity has provoked some angry responses. For Francine Prose, "Briar Rose" describes "a sort of modified necrophilia: not exactly sex with a corpse – literal graveyard amour – but rather sex with a woman who only *appears* to have left the world of the living" (Prose 286). It signals to her that what men want is "not a living, breathing woman but rather a barely sensate automaton or receptive pillowy sex toy" (287). According to Prose, the sleeping princess says, in effect, "I'm asleep, dear . . . and actually, to tell the truth, I may not even be . . . real. I'm what you've always dreamed about. Do with me what you will" (291). In Jane Yolen's revision of the tale for children, *Sleeping Ugly*, the prince chooses to awaken the virtuous Plain Jane, discovered sleeping next to Princess Miserella, who is beautiful but mean. Married, the prince and Plain Jane use the sleeping princess as a conversation piece and a clothes tree in their hallway.[15] These writers pick up on the sexism which some fairy-tale

[15] As recounted in Zipes, *Brothers* 155.

scholars have seen in the story of Briar Rose. Folklorist Jack Zipes says that one of the "mythic messages" of this tale is that while "[w]omen are indeed helpless without men . . . generally catatonic or comatose, eternally waiting," by contrast, "[m]ale energy and will power can restore anything to life, even an immense realm in a coma. We just need the right man for the job" (Zipes, *Brothers* 152).

These concerns invite two responses. First, it is worth pointing out that the sleeping lover is not always the woman, in fairy tales. In fact, in quite a few of the Grimms' tales, the temptation to sleep must be resisted by the male character in order for magic to unfold, in rather the same way that Ruth Bottigheimer has identified silence as a requisite for female characters in the tales.[16] Episodes where women plead for recognition from lovers who have been put into an enchanted sleep, usually by wicked princesses who want the men for themselves, appear in "The Singing, Springing Lark," "The Two Kings' Children," "The Drummer" and as follows, in "The Iron Stove":

> When evening came, she said to her bridegroom, "That silly kitchen maid wants to sleep in your room."
>
> "If you don't mind," he said, "neither do I."
>
> Nonetheless, the bride gave him a glass of wine with a sleeping potion in it. Then the bridegroom and the kitchen maid went into the chamber to sleep, but he slept so soundly that she could not wake him, which made her weep the entire night, lamenting, "I rescued you from the wild forest and the iron stove. I

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[16] Bottigheimer's *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys* (1987) examines speech and silencing in the tales, along with other motifs, to demonstrate that the Grimms depicted a "dualistic world" (29) where men have all the power.

searched for you and went across a glass mountain, three sharp swords, and a great lake until I found you. And now you won't listen to me."

In each tale, the prince or his servants become aware of the situation by the third night, the enchanted sleep is averted and the lovers are reunited. Similar tales where heroes forget their former lover, again as the result of magic, and are jolted out of that oblivion by the shock of recognition, include, in the Grimms' collection, "Sweetheart Roland" and "The True Bride."[17] Sleep is an obstacle for males to overcome in other Grimms' tales. In "The Water of Life," there are two episodes in which sleeping endangers the hero – first, when he lies down in an enchanted castle and falls asleep, barely escaping with the water of life before the gates close at twelve o'clock; and second, when his jealous brothers, who want to be the ones to bring the magic water to their ailing father, take it from him while he is sleeping on board the ship sailing home. In a similar sequence in "The Two Brothers," the hero falls asleep beside the princess he has rescued from a dragon, and an evil marshal cuts off his head and takes the princess back to her father as his own bride. (The hero's faithful animal companions reattach his head using a magic root, but, in a rare instance of fairy-tale slapstick, initially they put it on backwards.) Grimms' tales where heroes are admonished by princesses not to sleep, and do, and thereby fail, or almost fail, to be of service to them, include "The Raven" and "The Six Servants."

Furthermore, it is significant that in some variants of the tale, the prince is not

[17] "Then she went up to him and kissed him on the left cheek. At that moment his eyes were finally opened, and he recognized his true bride."

directly responsible for the princess awakening from her enchanted sleep. In Basile's *Pentamerone*, a baby nursing at its mother's breast awakens her by sucking out the splinter, while in the Grimms' "Briar Rose," the hundred-year curse is expiring just as the prince arrives; it may be as a result of his good timing, as much as anything else about him, that the thorny enclosure bursts into bloom upon his arrival, and then opens to admit his passage. Ruth Bottigheimer calls the prince's timing in "Briar Rose" "a literary fact more often overlooked than understood" (Bottigheimer 164), although she neglects to explain it herself. Bruno Bettelheim is willing to supply an answer, however. According to the Freudian child psychologist, the central theme of "Briar Rose" is that, despite all attempts on the part of parents to prevent their child's sexual awakening, it will take place nonetheless (Bettelheim 230). The entry into a hidden chamber represents Beauty's entry into sexual mysteries (232). Her pricking her finger on the spinning wheel, with that action's resultant bleeding, has obvious sexual connotations (233). More importantly, Bettelheim points out that many princes attempt to reach the princess and perish in the thorns, and that only when she has gained physical and emotional maturity does she become accessible:

> But when Sleeping Beauty has finally gained both physical and emotional maturity and is ready for love, and with it for sex and marriage, then that which had seemed impenetrable gives way. The wall of thorns suddenly turns into a wall of big, beautiful flowers, which opens to let the prince enter. The implied message is the same as in many other fairy tales: don't worry and don't try to hurry things – when the time is ripe, the impossible problem will be solved, as if all by itself. (233)

The tale proves, Bettelheim says, that to have to wait a long time for sexual fulfilment "does not at all detract from its beauty" (231). Bettelheim's emphasis on the "beauty" of sexual initiation, like his emphasis on the prince's coincidental timing in the tale, encourages an alternative view to that which sees Briar Rose's passivity as equated with her desirability.

As was discussed in Chapter Three of this essay, Murdoch has made a connection in her novels between romantic love and morality. Falling in love is one way for a Murdoch character to become more morally aware, for it involves a character tightly in the web of human responsibility that Murdoch has located at the centre of her moral universe, in the "system" of "human frailty" which creates an "endlessly spreading network" (Murdoch, *Nice* 198) of cause and effect. Byatt has called introduced a similar concept to her fiction, calling it a "beautiful network of designed movement" (Byatt, *Game* 75), while Drabble's novels have also referred to "a vast web, a vast network, which was humanity itself" (Drabble, *Radiant* 73). In the view of these writers, we are bound even to complete strangers by the obligation to treat others kindly; the connections forged by love affairs are necessarily more involving. In Murdoch's novels, this fact is made explicit by the association of romantic love with goodness. Dipple sees Murdoch detailing three kinds of goodness in her work: besides "self-abnegation, renunciation and withdrawl"; and the dictate "that one accept the world and know oneself in the true context of that world"; one might attain goodness in Murdoch's world through "joy, feelings of transcendence, love and religious elevation" (Dipple 79). Murdoch herself has said that religion has less to do with God than it does "with truth and love" (Brans, Interview with Murdoch 184), that it involves "love and compassion and the overcoming

of self" (Meyers 220). In Murdoch's novels, therefore, falling in love does not simply make a character happier; it can make them a better person. As Elizabeth Dipple has observed, "evil in Murdoch's world resides in the failure of human relationship, whereas good exists in its narrow and infrequent success" (Dipple 196).

But Murdoch is particular about the nature of the love which might sharpen a character's moral purpose, and most of her characters fail to achieve that kind of bond with another. Sexual attraction is certainly an element in the sequences that begin this chapter, as implied by the onlooker's intense physical scrutiny of the sleeper's body, and sex alone will not build a lasting relationship. Most often, it is a male viewing a sleeping female, and generally, the male is the dominant partner in the relationship. Hence, the concerns some readers have expressed regarding the association of female sexuality and passivity in "Briar Rose" have an application to these sequences as well. Note Bradley Pearson's scrutiny, in *The Black Prince*, of his friend's teenage daughter, Julian, who has just become embroiled in a disastrous affair with Bradley:

> She lay on her back with her throat exposed as if to the knife. Her shoulders, pale in colour, were as creamy as the moon at dusk. Her knees were a little drawn up, the bare muddied feet sideways and pointed. Her hands, also brown with earth, had found each other and nestled between her breasts like a pair of animals. Her right thigh, below the line of the white fringe, was red and scraped in two places, once where she had climbed over the fence, once where she had thrown herself out of the car. (Murdoch, *Black* 267)

The wounds on Julian's legs, and the description of her throat as "exposed as if to the knife," suggest a vulnerability which no doubt increases her appeal for the controlling

Bradley; he forces himself on her later and makes her cry. In some of the other "Sleeping Beauty" sequences in Murdoch, a similar power dynamic is referenced, which is likely gratified by the vulnerability that sleep implies. In *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, Monty sees David's face, "made remote by sleep," as "a beautiful death mask" (Murdoch, *Sacred* 229), with the teenager's palm turned upward "as if imploring" (215-216). In *The Good Apprentice*, Edward feels excited when his "huge" shadow towers over the sleeping Ilona, who appears by comparison "so helpless, so fragile and frail, as if it could hardly be imagined how she stayed in being at all" (Murdoch, *Apprentice* 299).

But images of death in these sequences suggest another reason for the sleeper's appeal, besides a potentially violent eroticism at work in the relationship: asleep, the beloved is simultaneously less than and more than what they were when awake. David, in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, is "made remote by sleep, blanched and smoothed by the vague light" (Murdoch, *Sacred* 229). Ilona asleep wears "a seal of peace" in *The Good Apprentice* (Murdoch, *Apprentice* 299). Harvey looks "benign and calm" to Moy in *The Green Knight* (Murdoch, *Green* 362). In each case, the sleeper is not quite himself or herself, but rather, a "blanched," "sealed" and "benign" version of that person, and this version proves more attractive to the viewer. In *The Black Prince*, Bradley admits that Julian's "sudden magical withdrawal into unconsciousness" was "just what I had been wanting . . . to be with her and not with her" (Murdoch, *Black* 267). Repeatedly in Murdoch's novels, characters must learn the difficult truth that they have fallen in love with an image rather than a real person, that they have been seduced by the message Francine Prose detects in "Briar Rose": the sleeping beloved signals, according to Prose, "I'm what you've always dreamed about. Do with me what you will." Some of

Murdoch's characters must end their relationships, having learned that they were based on fantasy and illusion, while others manage to salvage them, and transform unrealistic expectations into real love.

Peter Conradi says that in Murdoch's novels, what he calls "myth" (he does not define the term) represents a dangerous tendency for generalization – it "bullies" the plural into the singular (Conradi 83). Her protagonists have to give up the temptation to allegorize (86). Deborah Johnson argues that this creation of "gratifying" or "sustaining" fictions is "a predominantly male activity" in Murdoch's novels, which her female characters "are often given the role of undermining" (Johnson 6). (Certainly, in the sequences which we have been discussing, most of the viewers are male, and their illusions about the sleeping beloved are undermined when that person awakens.) According to Elizabeth Dipple, mythology, art and religion – seemingly disparate elements which Dipple sees as interchangeable in Murdoch's novels – are contradictory, because they aid in enlightenment, but they also enable characters to "mythologize themselves and others, to control the world by imposing a referential frame on things." She observes, "It is easier to love this mythic form than to allow the real existence of others to carry on freely . . . to create imaginary dream worlds, rather than looking clearly at the reality of the world" (Dipple 100). In Murdoch's novels, Dipple says, attaining "knowledge is a process of particularizing, of making experience more and more explicit rather than abstracting it into theory (7). Conradi agrees that Murdoch's most admirable characters resist classifying others and instead emphasize singularity (Conradi 35). In a novel by Murdoch, Dipple says, "The task is being able to accept the world we live in and not to settle for the one we continually create by our infinitely capacious illusions"

(Dipple 34).

We can see that illusions have been at work in the relationships Murdoch describes using "Briar Rose." In *The Black Prince* (1973), Bradley Pearson, fifty-eight, a divorced, unsuccessful novelist, falls in love with the daughter of his best friend, Arnold Baffin, a famous and widely published novelist. Julian, who is twenty, is obviously not valued by Bradley for who she is: moved as he is by the sight of her asleep, in the passage cited at the top of this chapter, weirdly, Bradley is only able to consummate their relationship when Julian dresses up like Hamlet. And sex seems to change his mind about her; lying in bed afterwards, Bradley considers, "I had removed, at any rate, my next obstacle, though the world beyond it looked different again, not what I had expected . . . changing, it seemed, even from second to second." Now that he has satisfied his lust, Bradley thinks, "The girl looked different, I looked different. Was that the body which I had worshipped every part of?" (Murdoch, *Black* 283). He wonders if, for Julian also, "Perhaps tomorrow morning it would all seem to her like a dreadful dream" (267).

When Bradley tells her afterwards, "We were both possessed" (Murdoch, *Black* 289), he may already be rethinking the relationship. Julian's father has to encourage him: "Can't you see it's over?" Arnold Baffin says. "You have had a caper with a silly girl and now it's over. The spell is broken" (291). Julian's mother, Rachel, also tries to get Bradley to end the relationship, partly because she is in love with Bradley herself. "This thing is all in your mind," she tells him (306). "Your Julian is a fiction" (307). Bradley protests, "Love is a sort of certainty, perhaps the only sort" (307). But Rachel argues, "It's just a state of mind . . . . Bradley dear, do try to come back to reality" (307-308). She tells him, "That sort of love is an illusion" (310). Although earlier, Bradley had

watched Julian sleep, as the prince watches Briar Rose, it seems that he also has something in common with the fairy tale's heroine: Rachel tells him, "Oh do wake up, Bradley" (310). Bradley is finally persuaded that his love for Julian was based on fantasy, but insists that his feelings seemed real at the time: "Can any lover doubt that *now* he sees truly?" (173). He insists, "This was no delirium. Those who have loved so will understand me. There was an overwhelming sense of reality" (175). Moreover, Bradley defends himself by saying that such illusions sustain us: "Every man is tiny and comic to his neighbour. And when he seeks an idea of himself he seeks a false idea. No doubt we need these ideas, we may have to live by them" (339-340).

In *Bruno's Dream* (1968), Miles Greensleave, another failed writer – this time a poet – falls in love with his wife's sister, Lisa, a schoolteacher and former nun. Miles's father Bruno, dying of a wasting illness, contemplates the degree to which fantasy impacts our lives: "It's all a dream, he thought, one goes through life in a dream, it's all too *hard* . . . and in our last things we subsist only in the dream of another, a shade within a shade, fading, fading, fading" (Murdoch, *Bruno's* 7). Lisa describes love similarly: "the great light flashes on," she says, "revealing perhaps reality or perhaps illusion" (269). Illusion is a part of the attraction between Miles and Lisa – she says, "Thinking would be fatal. There must be no thinking" (162). But when he watches her sleep, his feelings seem real to Miles: "The violent pounding of his heart was making him feel sick and faint . . . . He was trembling so violently that his fingernails scratched the sheet with a tearing sound. Uttering a sighing groan he fell on his knees beside the bed" (160). Like Bradley in *The Black Prince*, Miles is also compared to Briar Rose as well as the prince: "Something at the very heart of his world which had been sleeping was now terribly

awake . . . . He loved Lisa" (149). When Lisa plans to move to a mission in Calcutta, partly out of her fear of hurting her sister by continuing the affair, Miles comforts himself with the thought that now, he will be able to love her from afar. In fact, this arrangement seems ideal to him: "She was dedicated, separated, withdrawn forever beyond a grill, behind a curtain," he imagines. "[a]nd he would worship her cold virtue" (256). Perhaps the idea of Lisa in Calcutta, like Lisa asleep, is better than the real thing for Miles. When she suddenly cancels her travel plans and marries his brother-in-law, Miles is shocked:

> When at last Diana did succeed in persuading Miles of the truth of what she said, that Lisa was not leading a dedicated life in India but was to be seen riding about London in Danby's new sports car and dining with Danby at riverside restaurants, dressed in extremely smart new clothes, Miles gave himself up to a day of rage and execration. He cursed Danby, he cursed Lisa. He said it could not possibly last. She would be sorry, my God, she would be sorry! He announced himself irreparably damaged . . . . On the third day he said to Diana enigmatically, 'It's all over now,' and returned to work in the summer house. (289-290)

Miles's illusions about Lisa are so powerful that it requires a considerable effort for him to finally accept her as she really is.

In *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), Charles Arrowby, a retired theatre director whose arrogance has alienated many of his friends and lovers, makes contact with an old girlfriend in a misguided attempt to recapture the magic of their former relationship. Looking back on his life, Charles has decided that Hartley was his one true love, and he believes that given the opportunity, she will leave her dreary husband, a fire-extinguisher salesman, and her dreary suburban home for the glamorous life that he can offer and that

he knows she must prefer. Hartley's resistance to this idea only leads Charles to redouble his efforts. He abducts her and locks her into a room in his country house, in the belief that she is yet unconscious of what he could offer her. He feels that he must "awaken" her from the "spellbound" state that he believes she developed over the years to protect herself from the painful realities of her life (Murdoch, *Sea* 303). "I was waking up my sleeping princess" (277), Charles imagines, "I, and I only, could revive her; I was the destined prince" (356). It is only after Hartley, freed from Charles's upstairs room, sells her house and flees with her husband to Australia that Charles acknowledges the futility of his efforts.

Charles's theatre intimacies are shallow, but they are the closest thing he has to friendship. His problem, as his former girlfriend Lizzie says, is that "[y]ou don't respect people as people. You don't *see* them" (Murdoch, *Sea* 45). Another ex-girlfriend, Rosina, tells Charles that he lives in an "image" and that he is "never interested in the people you want" (108). He has "lived in a hedonistic dream all (his) life" (185). Charles admits that he appreciates the "magic" part of relationships but not their reality, which he calls "mess" (38). He objects when his friend Perry accuses him of despising women, using as evidence his love for Shakespeare's heroines. But Perry points out that "they don't exist, dear man . . . . They live in the never-never land of art . . . filling us with false hopes and empty dreams" (163). If his love for Lizzie is "dreamy" (41), therefore, it is only because Charles has failed to appreciate her as she really is. His brother James tells Charles that what he loves is Hartley's "image, a doll, a simulacrum" (442). Hartley herself says that their relationship was based on illusion: it "isn't part of the real world," she says. "There was never any place for our love in the world. If there

had been it would have won" (280). Rosina agrees that first loves are "imaginary, they are fables" (184). James says that this long-lost love of Charles's is either a delusion, or it is a recent invention, or "pure imagination, pure fiction" (178). Charles finally acknowledges that he will never have access to Hartley's "interior being" (295). At the end of the novel, he wonders if he ever really loved her.

These three characters – Charles Arrowby, Miles Greensleave and Bradley Pearson – show, in their attachment to fantasy and illusion, what amounts to a disregard for the women they claim to love. Their relationships can not thrive because their love, such as it is, is selfish. Angela Hague points out that Murdoch's novels typically detail "the destruction of peace and order and the establishment of a new world." In this new world, characters must learn that they are not the centre of the universe, and that they can achieve happiness only when they see their own importance in the perspective of the needs and rights of those around them.[18] In these three relationships, the needs of the women involved are not acknowledged until it is too late. In *Bruno's Dream*, Miles realizes, "In a way he knew very little about Lisa" (Murdoch, *Bruno's* 149), but he does not care: "absorbed in observing the painful evolution of his own feelings, he had not yet very much considered this" (159). The loved ones sometimes figure as works of art rather than real people – Julian wears for Bradley in *The Black Prince* "the dazed empty look of a great statue" (Murdoch, *Black* 284), just as in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, Montague Small sees his neighbours' blond teenage son David, the object of his desire, as an image from a painting of the death of Chatterton (Murdoch, *Sacred* 229).

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[18] Angela Hague, *Iris Murdoch's Comic Vision* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1984) 68.

Or if they are not works of art, the loved ones are seen as holy, as Madonnas rather than flesh-and-blood human beings – in *Bruno's Dream*, Miles imagines that Lisa "was not as other women, she was a kind of religious" (Murdoch, *Bruno's* 148), while Bradley in *The Black Prince* sees Julian as "some wonderful holy woman, a prophetess, a temple prostitute" (Murdoch, *Black* 284). Viewing the beloved as a work of art or as a religious figure, though it may seem flattering (comparisons to prostitutes aside), permits these men to love without really getting involved.

Often, one person in the relationship has a particular agenda which an acknowledgment of the other person's needs would interrupt. Murdoch comes down hard in her novels on this idea of using another person to some end, and disguising that use as love. In *Bruno's Dream*, Miles asks Lisa to help him "relive" (Murdoch, *Bruno's* 163) his marriage to Parvati, the love of his life, who was killed soon after their marriage. "Lisa, you're the only one I could connect with Parvati," he says. "It would give meaning to everything" (163). Understandably, Lisa resists standing in for another woman in order to help Miles: "You must do that alone" (164), she tells him. In *The Black Prince*, Bradley thinks that loving a woman thirty years younger than him will permit him to escape his past – principally, his divorce. Julian's mother Rachel has to warn him, "But, Bradley, one is responsible for one's actions, and one's past does belong to one . . . . You can't make yourself into a new person overnight, no matter how much in love you feel you are" (Murdoch, *Black* 310). In *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), Charles Arrowby finds his former girlfriend Hartley attractive in spite of how the years have changed her, because of her connection with a past where he was happy, and where he was a better person than he has become. He believes that loving her again will "give me back my own best self

. . . she had held it and kept it all these years" (Murdoch, *Sea* 186). In her company, "the old early innocent world would quietly reassemble itself" (371). Hartley herself sees that "you just want someone to remember things with" (299). In *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, Montague Small, a successful thriller writer mourning the recent death of his wife following a prolonged illness, is attracted to the neighbour's sixteen-year-old son. He feels reassured, because his response to David means that he has begun to return to the world: this is "some first horrible signal of a mindless return to life" (Murdoch, *Sacred* 114). But he acknowledges, "How mad, to hope to be consoled by a young boy, and one who was cram full of his own miseries anyway" (229). And unlike Bradley, Miles and Charles, Monty recognizes from the start that his feelings are temporary, just a stage: "I must get beyond," he thinks, "I must get through" (114).

Peter Conradi says that "What is supernatural for Murdoch is principally the imagination itself, and love in particular" (Conradi 42), and it does seem that a kind of magic is at work in the relationships in Murdoch's novels which manage to survive the selfishness and illusion which we have been following here. If many of the romances in her novels which use a "Briar Rose" motif fail, Murdoch's implication that magic is at work in the ones that succeed prevents the easy conclusion that she is challenging the assumptions of the fairy tale. In *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), Thomas Abelson (Tuan) and Rosalind Berran, students brought together by the wedding of their friends, fall in love. They make some of the mistakes we have been charting, but something remains to be salvaged in their case. It is clear that they have illusions about each other, even after they have slept together. Lying in bed the next morning, Rosalind thinks, "Tuan was indeed so absolutely a knight, Rosalind found herself positively seeing, in and out of her dreams,

his glowing silver armour" (Murdoch, *Jackson's* 234). Tuan had told Rosalind, when she pursued him relentlessly, "You don't know me," and "this is just an impulse" (164). He warned her, "love can be unreal and ephemeral" (183). But Rosalind persists in loving Tuan, and in seeing him as a prince. Tuan, in turn, had watched Rosalind sleeping, in a passage cited at the beginning of this chapter. Like some of Murdoch's other heroes, he had also been compared to Briar Rose himself: worrying that his shadowy family history made him undeserving of Rosalind's love, Tuan thought, "I am under a curse, I *cannot* marry! He had lost track of the day, of the time" (196). Both believe that the relationship has changed them. When they go to bed together, "Rosalind felt faint. An extraordinary wave of being which she had never experienced before overwhelmed her" (183). It is a transforming experience for Tuan also, who feels "a kind of *total change* as if some quite *alien rays* were transforming his body" (196). But no one warns them, as Rachel warns Bradley in *The Black Prince*, "You can't make yourself into a new person overnight, no matter how much in love you feel you are" (Murdoch, *Black* 310). Instead, everything works out well for the lovers, "like a fairy tale" (Murdoch, *Jackson's* 234).

One wonders what it is about this relationship that sets it apart from the others. One important difference is that the lovers do not seek to possess each other. It is something of a contradiction in Murdoch's work that one supposedly does others a disservice by failing to see them as they really are, at the same time as one is cautioned against having too penetrating, too intrusive a regard into another's life. According to Peter Conradi, the distinction between love and sex in Murdoch is such that "[w]e desire in obedience to the fixed patterns of our sexual imagination, but we fall in love when we are really seeing another person" (Conradi 85). Murdoch herself has said, "I think that

people create myths about themselves and are then dominated by the myths . . . . I think romantic love is an occasion for significant change in the way people create these myths. Love is a kind of bombshell that breaks peoples' lives, really falling in love" (Bellamy 138). But Murdoch's work also illustrates how seeing someone too clearly is a disservice to them, that real understanding begins, strangely enough, in the acknowledgment that understanding is impossible. It is a point that she argued in her first published novel, *Under the Net* (1954). When Jake Donoghue, a translator and playwright, finally acknowledges that his old flame, Anna, exists as a separate and never completely knowable person, it seems to forecast a future for them for the first time:

> I had no longer any picture of Anna. She faded like a sorcerer's apparition; and yet somehow her presence remained to me, more substantial than before. It seemed as if, for the first time, Anna really existed now as a separate being and not as a part of myself. To experience this was extremely painful. Yet as I tried to keep my eyes fixed upon where she was I felt towards her a sense of initiative which was perhaps after all one of the guises of love. Anna was something which had to be learnt afresh. When does one ever know a human being? Perhaps only after one has realized the impossibility of knowledge and renounced the desire for it and finally ceased to feel even the need of it. (Murdoch, *Under* 238)

Hence, in *Jackson's Dilemma*, Rosalind insists on knowing more of Tuan, who is full of secrets. She pleads with him constantly, saying, "I want to know more of you . . . . You are a mystery, but don't be . . . . I want to know you" (Murdoch, *Jackson's* 145). But Tuan fights off her attempts to understand him, choosing instead to reveal himself a little bit at a time. Tuan does not really know Rosalind either, but it does not trouble him.

"Whatever sort of girl I have married," he thinks, "I have married the right one" (235). Murdoch implies that this is the appropriate way of conducting a love affair.

A.S. Byatt and Margaret Drabble have placed the lovers in their novels under similar constraints. Jane Campbell says that Byatt writes about "the devastation that can result from the misuse of imagination – especially from attempting to invade the mental space of another person" (Campbell 147). Campbell's essay explores the relationship between sisters in Byatt's novel, *The Game* (1967) – similar, as some critics have noted, to Byatt's relationship with Drabble, her sister in real life – which is like an "imprisonment" (Campbell 156) in its closeness, such that the two women fight for the attentions of the same man. Drabble has said, "I like the idea that one can't know people wholly, but one can value them for what they are and they continue to surprise. And that is a way of caring, taking them for what they are and being continually intrigued by them." She is saddened by the prospect of "bad marriages where people think they know everything about the other person" (Brans, Interview with Drabble 228). The platonic relationship between Kate Armstrong and Hugo Mainwaring in *The Middle Ground* (1980) is, perhaps, a good example of the ideal friendship, for Drabble: Kate and Hugo are "so close and so remote, so familiar and yet so incomprehensibly obscure" to each other (Drabble, *Middle* 232). Kate thinks, "Hugo is only a man," and Hugo thinks, "Ah, folly . . . she is just a woman," and yet they never fully understand one another, which means that they can never really take each other for granted. "How lucky we are," Kate tells Hugo, "That we should each think each other so wonderful" (233). An ambivalence is therefore introduced into the romances described by all three writers which illustrate that loving someone means not prying too closely into their interior life.

One can see the distinction between the relationship enjoyed by Tuan and Rosalind in *Jackson's Dilemma*, and those in other novels by Murdoch that see characters striving to possess one another. Although Bradley in *The Black Prince* certainly entertains illusions about Julian, failing in effect to appreciate who she really is, at the same time it is suggested the lovers would like to crawl inside one another:

> (Julian:) 'Now I feel as if I were alone – and yet I'm not – I'm – I'm you – I'm both of us.'
>
> 'Yes. Yes.'
>
> 'You even resemble me. I feel I'm looking into a mirror.'
>
> I had the strange feeling that I was speaking these words. I was speaking through her, through the pure echoing emptiness of her being, hollowed by love.
>
> 'Then I looked into your eyes and thought: Bradley! Now you have no name.'
>
> 'We are possessed.' (285)

Similarly, in *Bruno's Dream*, Miles says to Lisa, "Do you know what I noticed long ago, that we resemble each other, physically I mean?" Lisa suggests, "It's because I've thought about you so much," but Miles says, "No, it's because you were made for me. You are the one" (Murdoch, *Bruno's* 162). This kind of intrusion into another person's autonomy is just as bad, in Murdoch's view, as failing to acknowledge them properly in the first place. Both approaches to a loved one – fantasy and possession – are misguided and lead to trouble. Bradley in *The Black Prince* says that love is a way of resisting death, but his phrasing is suggestive when he says: "That's why love is so important. It's the only way of apprehending somebody that really holds them and sustains them in being" (Murdoch, *Black* 317); he would like to "apprehend" and "hold" Julian in his

feelings for her, rather than permitting her to breathe. Before long, his possessiveness drives Julian back to her family. Similarly, Miles in *Bruno's Dream* believes that having a wife and a mistress at the same time is a simple problem of management: "He would *hold* the situation . . . and this holding would be an embrace which strongly enfolded both Lisa and Diane" (M urdoch, *Bruno's* 175). Lisa leaves Miles at the end of the novel for his less controlling brother-in-law.

In *A Severed Head* (1961), the lovers seem destined for a future together at the end of the novel, although it concludes with him telling her "I hardly know you!" and the two of them smiling. Like Tuan and Rosalind, they make many of the same mistakes as the other, less fortunate lovers we have seen in Murdoch's novels, but their acknowledgment of each other's autonomy allows them to salvage the relationship. After Martin Lynch-Gibbon, a wine dealer, loses his wife to her psychoanalyst, he falls in love with the psychoanalyst's sister, Honor Klein, a weird anthropologist. It is clear that fantasy is at work in the relationship: Martin sees Honor as "some remote and self-absorbed deity" (Murdoch, *Severed* 93) and says that hers is "like a face in a Spanish religious painting" (110). When he realizes that he has fallen in love with her, he admits that the real, earthly Honor is not really involved, saying, "It was strange too how little this passion . . . had to do in any simple or comprehensible sense with the flesh" (125). Like the others, Martin is inspired by "Briar Rose" in his relationship. He imagines that "I would be the first person to discover her, that I would be her conqueror and her awakener" (129). He says, "I had dreamed of her as free, as alone, as awaiting in her still slumbering consciousness for me, reserved, separated, sacred" (138). Labouring as he has been under this illusion, Martin experiences a shock when he finds Honor in bed with

her brother, who has apparently been her lover for many years. The passage that recounts his discovery offers an interesting contrast with the excerpts describing sleeping lovers which began this chapter:

> The room was brightly lit. Sitting up in this bed and staring straight at me was Honor. She was sitting sideways with the sheet over her legs. Upwards she was as tawny and as naked as a ship's figurehead. I took in her pointed breasts, her black shaggy head of hair, her face stiff and expressionless as carved wood. She was not alone. Beside the bed a naked man was hastily engaged in pulling on a dressing-gown. It was immediately and indubitably apparent that I had interrupted a scene of lovers. The man was Palmer. (128)

Completely absent from this description is the romance which characterized the other "Briar Rose" passages, with their dimly lit rooms and hair spilled on the pillow. Now that he knows more about her, Honor tries to persuade Martin that she can not be with him: "There is no place for such a love," she says (180). "Return to reality . . . do not think that this is more than a dream" (181). She argues, "Your love for me does not inhabit the real world . . . . As real people we do not exist for each other" (182). But seemingly against the odds, this strange relationship has a chance. Martin assumes that he has lost Honor to her brother, who is leaving the country. Watching her at the airport, he finds that "[s]he looked to my eyes of farewell touchingly mortal . . . her demon splendour quenched. Only now could I see, in her ugliness, her beauty" (198). It is as if he is seeing her properly for the first time. At the end of the novel, Honor changes her travel plans and returns to Martin. He tells her, "We have lived together in a dream up to now. When we awake will we find each other still?" (205). He says, "An intoxicating

sense possessed me that at last we were treating on equal terms" (204). Equal though they may be, their laughing acknowledgment that they are strangers to each other ends the novel.

Murdoch uses "Briar Rose" to shed light on romantic relationships and the autonomy and sense of equality that she feels are essential to their success. For many readers, however, female vulnerability and misery are at the heart of the tale. Ruth Bottigheimer's essay, "Spinning and Discontent," proposes that the Grimms' tales about women spinning "send a double message." While on the surface, the tales associate spinning with industry that will be rewarded with riches, Bottigheimer believes the Grimms' informants, many of them women, "buried a message" in the tales about "the grim reality of generations of spinning girls' and women's lives" (Bottigheimer 122). Although Bottigheimer says that the spindle in "Briar Rose" carries "a neutral value," being "a mere hinge on which the tale turns" (120), perhaps it is no wonder how many Sleeping Beauty variants throughout the world show women put to sleep by spinning – the French tale; the Grimms' tale; *Perceforest*, where a splinter in the fibre causes sleep; the Arabian story of "Sittukan," where a flax filament under the heroine's fingernail knocks her out.[19] That the tale offers only a narrow existence for its heroine is explored in Anne Sexton's poem "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)," where she describes the princess as the victim of her father's overprotection even before the prince takes charge of her: "I was passed hand to hand / Like a bowl of fruit."

Indeed, the Grimms' "Briar Rose" has sometimes described female suffering for

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[19] As recounted in Bottigheimer 120.

Murdoch as well, a fact that troubles somewhat her use of the tale elsewhere to describe seemingly happy and successful romances. In Murdoch's darkest novel, *The Time of the Angels* (1966), nineteen-year-old Elizabeth, suffering from a "weakness" which is "a mystery to the doctors" (Murdoch, *Angels* 43), often falls asleep in the company of others, or slips away into a semiconscious trance, "some kind of puzzlement . . . . an apathetic coldness, a vagueness" which drifts over her "like a cloud." Her condition makes Elizabeth "dreadfully fascinating" (97) to a number of suitors, who enjoy the idea of this "sleeping beauty" locked away in her father's house, "a virgin, a girl who had been kept away from everybody, absolutely shut up and hidden and sort of reserved" (67), as one suitor puts it. But as the reader discovers late in the novel, Elizabeth is not a virgin but the sexual object of her father, the evil ex-priest Carel Fisher. Even after her father has killed himself, Elizabeth remains in a kind of half-light, approaching life "vacantly and without interest" (227). "On the face of it," say historians Iona and Peter Opie, "the message of the fairy tales is that transformation to a state of bliss is effected not by magic, but by the perfect love of one person for another" (Opies 17). Murdoch's novels similarly illustrate how a kind of magic can be at work in loving relationships. If Elizabeth is tragically denied this transforming possibility, it is nevertheless reassuring that others among Murdoch's heroes and heroines are permitted to find, in the love of another, their happy ending.

SECTION THREE – COMMUNITY

Chapter Five

Beast Tales II

In Iris Murdoch's novel *The Green Knight* (1993), Aleph Anderson, a beautiful nineteen-year-old girl, elopes with her history teacher Lucas, a much older and nastier person, so bad-tempered that he once tried to murder his own brother out of jealous spite. Aleph's sister Sefton describes the union as that of "Beauty and the Beast," and observes wryly, "Women love Beasts." But Sefton's boyfriend Harvey, who has a better acquaintance with the history teacher, objects that "Lucas can be – not like he seems" (Murdoch, *Green* 421). In this novel filled with allusions to fairy tales, Lucas is not transformed by love, like the prince disguised as a beast in the fairy tale Sefton mentions; it is simply that his new bride is capable of appreciating complexities which others in their tightly knit community have not recognized in him. Chapter Three of this essay examined references to animal-bridegroom fairy tales in the works of Murdoch, A.S. Byatt and Margaret Drabble as explorations of the transforming effects of sexual and romantic love, along with the dangers. These themes are present in the Grimms' "The Singing, Springing Lark" (their version of the French fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast"), "The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich," "Hans My Hedgehog" and "Snow White and Rose Red" (where the bridegroom is a bear), as they are in the associated tale "Brother and Sister," and in those tales which depict monstrous but clearly human husbands, such as "Bluebeard" and "The Robber Bridegroom." But this passage quoted from *The Green Knight* reflects yet another dimension of animal-bridegroom tales – and a central concern of Byatt's

Possession (1990), Drabble's *The Witch of Exmoor* (1996) and Murdoch's *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) – which is their depiction of the individual connected to and in conflict with a community that seeks to define them.

Byatt's interest in biology and history as linking us to the world and to each other, an idea present in many of her novels, permits her characters, like poet and naturalist Randolph Henry Ash in *Possession* (1990), to imagine "a continuity and interdependence of all life, which might perhaps assist in . . . doing away with the notion of individual death" (Byatt, *Possession* 271). In Byatt's latest novel, *The Biographer's Tale* (2000), she calls this continuity "conscience."[20] Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt signal the individual's obligations to community in references throughout their fiction to a "web" or "network" of human endeavour. But characters in these novels do not always rush to embrace this vision of the world that positions them in the midst of community obligations. References to animal-bridegroom tales show that some feel split by the demands of relationships, on the one hand, and the attractions of solitude, on the other. "Human frailty forms a system . . . and faults in the past have their endlessly spreading network of results" (Murdoch, *Nice* 198), suggests Willy Kost in Murdoch's *The Nice and the Good* (1968). In *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), this system is described as "a bad network" (Murdoch, *Philosopher's* 59). In Byatt's novel *The Game* (1967), characters detect a "beautiful network of designed movement" in the structure of the universe. Suffering and sin cause "rents in the network" (Byatt, *Game* 75). In Drabble's novel *The Radiant Way* (1987), Liz Headleand's friend Alix, a social worker, learns that

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[20] See footnote 1.

"interlockings" between people establish them as "part of a vaster network, that there was a pattern, if only one could discern it." As she grows older, Alix increasingly questions the concept of the individual, seeing people instead as "intersections, threads, of a vast web, a vast network, which was humanity itself" (Drabble, *Radiant* 73). But, as Jane Campbell points out in her essay on Byatt's novel *The Game*, if unseen networks connect us to one another, the image "also has associations with webs that can trap us" (Campbell 157). The difficulty of simultaneously pleasing oneself and satisfying the demands of others is not always resolved in these writers' work, as their use of animal-bridegroom tales illustrates.

The cycle of fairy tales in which the hero is transformed from a monster to a prince obviously invites a psychoanalytical reading. According to Jungian Marie-Louise von Franz, in fairy tales the "animal double" is "an undeveloped aspect of the Self" (von Franz, *Interp.* 136). In *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), Freudian child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim theorized that animal siblings and animal husbands in fairy tales represent divergent aspects of the protagonist's psyche with which he or she must come to terms in order to successfully undergo the process of individuation. They might also illustrate one aspect in particular of that process of individuation – the conflict that arises between selfhood and community. This is a central theme in Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Drabble's *The Witch of Exmoor* (1996) and Murdoch's *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), novels that show characters resisting being defined by their relationships with others. In Byatt's *Possession*, a writer who feels the attraction of community ties finally throws them off in order to concentrate on her art. However, loneliness characterizes her later years. *The Witch of Exmoor* suggests that happiness lies in ignoring some standards of

behaviour imposed by the community, a truth learned late in life by the eccentric recluse, Frieda Haxby. However, Frieda's death – likely a suicide – complicates the lesson. In *The Philosopher's Pupil*, a man much discussed by his neighbours because of his bad temper and his abusive marriage comes to terms with the degree to which he has been defined by other people, and also acknowledges the extent of his responsibilities to the community. The ending to Murdoch's novel suggests, however, that it only appears that George McCaffrey has undergone a significant change; in truth, he was never that bad a person to begin with. In each case, animal-bridegroom fairy tales enable characters to reconsider the conflict between individuality and community. However, it is a matter which all three novels leave unresolved.

Bruno Bettelheim notes that there are two kinds of animals in fairy tales – those who are dangerous to the hero and those who provide assistance. Helpful animals appear in the Grimms' tale "The Two Brothers," for example, where each brother is aided in his quest to rescue the king's daughter by a hare, a fox, a wolf, a bear and a lion that he spared while out hunting. Meanwhile, a dangerous animal appears later in the tale, in the seven-headed dragon that one brother has to dispatch in order to free the princess. Bettelheim proposes, "Both dangerous and helpful animals stand for our animal nature, our instinctual drives," which may either hurt or benefit us (Bettelheim 76). Animal-bridegroom tales such as the Grimms' "The Singing, Springing Lark," where the lion is frightening to the heroine but also a candidate for marriage, combine these elements of danger and improvement in ways that were examined in Chapter Three of this essay. In that Grimms' tale, the girl's father does a poor job of reassuring her when he tells her that the beast she has been promised to is "a wild lion, and when he gets you, he'll tear you to

pieces and eat you up." However, the bride is later "welcomed in a friendly way" by the lion, who, in this version of the better-known French tale "Beauty and the Beast," assumes his human form each night. The animal aspect in the lion/prince is actually a benefit to the bride who can accommodate these qualities in a husband, Bettelheim implies: he says, "Only when animal nature has been befriended, recognized as important, and brought into accord with ego and superego does it lend its power to the total personality" (Bettelheim 78). Furthermore, according to Bettelheim, the "marriage of Beauty to the former Beast is a symbolic expression of the healing of the pernicious break between the animal and the higher aspects of man" (309). Thus, his animal side is also a benefit to the hero himself, in the extra dimension it contributes to his personality, however inconvenient it may initially prove.

That animal-bridegroom tales illustrate a personality split between the animal and the human, rather than a dramatic change from one to the other that leaves the hero better suited to participating in human society, is suggested by the number of tales where the beast, when he first appears, is only a beast for part of the time. In the Grimms' "The Singing, Springing Lark," the groom takes on a lion's form by day and a man's form at night. In their tale "The Six Swans," a princess's six brothers are swans by day and men by night. In the Italian tale, "The Man Who Came Out Only at Night," a poor fisherman's daughter rescues a man from the enchantment which makes him a tortoise by day, and then she marries him. In the Italian tale "The Dove Girl," twelve maidens can slip out of the "clothing" which makes them doves, in order to bathe; when the hero steals one of the maidens' dove skins while she is bathing, she is obliged to marry him (Calvino). This is reminiscent of Irish stories about selkies or seal-women who can be

similarly compelled to maintain their lovely human form by suitors who make off with their sealskins.

Not all readers interested in animal-bridegroom tales are impressed by psychoanalytical approaches that see integrated personalities emerging from the unions therein. Some argue that such readings overlook sexist overtones in the stories. Marina Warner, whose book *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1993) examines female roles in myth and fairy tales, acknowledges that animal-bridegroom tales promise the development of the bride's personality through marriage to the beast: "If she defeats him, or even kills him, if she outwits him, banishes or forsakes him, or accepts him and loves him," Warner says, the bride "arrives at some knowledge she did not possess; his existence and the challenge he offers is necessary" (Warner 318). But Warner is made uncomfortable by the implication that "Beauty stands in need of the Beast, rather than vice versa" (307), that the Beast has something to offer Beauty in his beastliness, because of how this privileges the male as a source of knowledge. It is true that animal brides are comparatively rare in fairy tales, and that, when they appear, they tend to be lovely rather than monstrous. Bettelheim sees in this an implication that, "to achieve a happy union, it is the female who has to overcome" (Bettelheim 285) her distaste for what her partner represents. Thus, a lady takes the form of a cat in the Grimms' "The Poor Miller's Apprentice and the Cat," and an enchanted princess becomes a bird in "The Raven." The man who weds such a creature has less to accommodate, presumably, than the bride of a lion, a bear, a frog or a donkey – all popular choices for animal bridegrooms in fairy tales.

However, in a Russian version of the Grimms' "The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich"

called "The Frog Princess," the youngest of three sons must endure a frog for a wife, when she returns the arrow he shot into the world. Fortunately for him, the frog turns out to be a princess in disguise (Afanasev). In the Swedish tale, "The Rats in the Juniper Bush," a prince who has to take home a rat for a bride – "he'd rather have returned without any fiancee at all than with a rat" – is pleased to witness her transformation later into a beautiful princess (Blecher). In the Grimms' tale "The Singing, Springing Lark," the young woman at the centre of the tale not only has to contend with a husband who takes a lion's form in the day and a man's form at night, but she must also defend her groom from the romantic advances of a wicked princess who sometimes appears as a dragon. Thus, Bettelheim's argument that "[b]oth dangerous and helpful animals stand for our animal nature, our instinctual drives," which may either hurt or benefit us (Bettelheim 76), might be said to illuminate equally the experiences of male and female characters in fairy tales.

Byatt's novel *Possession* (1990) uses animal-bridegroom tales to show the conflict women experience between community and selfhood in modern times and in nineteenth-century Britain. In the novel, two post-graduate students, Roland Mitchell and Maud Bailey, uncover a secret love affair between two nineteenth-century English poets, Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte. There were good reasons for keeping the affair secret: Ash was married at the time, and LaMotte was having an intimate relationship – possibly a love affair – with a woman painter who lived with her. As Roland and Maud work together to solve the literary mystery of how these poets found each other and the extent of their relationship, they also fall in love. Connections are made throughout the novel between Roland and Ash, the subject of Roland's PhD

dissertation, and between LaMotte and Maud, a LaMotte scholar revealed at the novel's end to be her descendant as well. One such connection is that women in the novel, in both the nineteenth-century and modern narratives, experience a split between their need to work and their desire for romance, which would create burdensome responsibilities to others. Julian Gitzen points out that this is "the dilemma of the Byatt protagonist, who must balance emotional needs against the necessity for 'solitude' in which to create" (Gitzen 87). The conflict between a woman's personal and professional life, in the case of poet Christabel LaMotte, does not find a happy resolution in the novel.

The story of "The Glass Coffin," included in a book of fairy tales written by LaMotte, illustrates the ideal that she had in mind regarding relationships and careers. In the story, a princess put into an enchanted sleep in a glass coffin by a wicked magician she refuses to marry, is rescued by a lowly tailor. Awakened and then kissed by him only out of a sense of obligation – "because he knew this was what he must do" – the princess says to the tailor, "You must be the one, you must be the one I have been waiting for, who must release me from enchantment. You must be the Prince." The tailor tells her, "Ah no, there you are mistaken. I am no more – and indeed no less – than a fine craftsman" (Byatt, *Possession* 73). The princess does not seem to mind that her rescuer is not a prince, laughing at his honesty. Yet she feels obliged to marry him nevertheless, believing that "the spell was as the spell was, that a kiss received after the successful disintegration of the glass casket was a promise, as kisses are, whether received voluntarily or involuntarily." The tailor does not share her belief that princesses must marry their heroes, saying, "I love you dearly already. Though why you should have me, simply because I opened the glass case, is less clear to me altogether" (74). Instead, the

princess and the tailor together rescue her enchanted brother, the true object of her affection, and the three of them move into a castle in the woods. There, the brother and sister spend their days hunting, while the tailor works on perfecting his craft, which is his own great passion in life. The tale describes a relationship between a man and a woman where neither is obliged to sacrifice those things that brought them happiness before they met.

But this reconciliation of human ties with individuality proves more difficult to achieve in the real world of Byatt's novel than it is in LaMotte's fairy tale. Modern women in the novel and their nineteenth-century counterparts are described as split between the demands of their lives. Roland Mitchell's girlfriend at the novel's beginning, Val, is a disillusioned former graduate student in English who works now for a temporary agency. Roland sees that as a result, Val has become split into two personalities: a sexy temp whom he can fantasize about, and an embittered woman who hassles him about his connection with the university that rejected her dissertation:

> There were now two Vals. One sat silently at home in old jeans and unevenly hanging long crepey shirts, splashed with murky black and purple flowers. This one had lustreless brown hair, very straight, hanging about a pale, underground face. Just sometimes, this one had crimson nails, left over from the other, who wore a tight black skirt and a black jacket with padded shoulders over a pink silk shirt and was carefully made up with pink and brown eyeshadow, brushed blusher along the cheekbone and plummy lips. This mournfully bright menial Val wore high heels and a black beret. She had beautiful ankles, invisible under the domestic jeans. Her hair was rolled into a passable pageboy and sometimes tied

with a black ribbon. She stopped short of perfume. (Byatt, *Possession* 17)

Maud Bailey also feels that her intellectual pursuits are at odds with her appearance. She dismisses her conventional good looks, which have elicited boos at feminist conferences, as "the doll-mask," and pretends that part of her self "had nothing to do with her, nothing" (64). She used to wear her blond hair cut short, but now she "wore it always inside some sort of covering, hidden away" (65). This is reminiscent of enchanted princes in animal-bridegroom tales who have their beauty covered by scales and bearskins until the happy ending reveals them. In the Grimms' "Snow White and Rose Red," for instance, the little girls who take a bear into their home on cold nights catch a glimpse of gold through his bearskin when he catches it on a nail.

LaMotte strives to achieve, in pursuing at the same time her writing and a relationship with Randolph Henry Ash, the ideal that her fairy tale about the tailor describes, but she too ends up divided, and in her case the split is fatal. LaMotte's most significant work during her life was a long poem about the shape-shifting fairy Melusina, a character from French medieval romance who becomes a snake when she bathes. The tale which inspires LaMotte changes shape like its protagonist: one scholar in the novel notes that, although the story of Melusina has been interpreted as describing "self-sufficient female sexuality," it is difficult to tell if this is a fair reading since "it keeps changing focus" (Byatt, *Possession* 39). LaMotte is drawn to the character of Melusina because of the division she represents. She says that she chooses her subjects from romance rather than history because in romance, "women's two natures can be reconciled," bringing together what men see as women's demonic and angelic sides which make them "double beings" (404). LaMotte tells Ash that what she likes about

Melusina is that she "has two aspects – an unnatural monster and a most proud and loving and handy woman" (191). She sees the fairy as "an unfortunate creature of Power and Frailty" (192). Visiting her cousin Sabine in France, LaMotte compares herself to "the fairy Melusine, the Sirens and the Mermaids" in that since her arrival she has not known what language to write in: "Everything shifts shape, my thoughts included" (377), she says. But the two aspects of the figure of Melusina which make her "increasingly fascinating" (192) for LaMotte can not be reconciled as easily in the poet's own life. The pressure of satisfying the demands of those she loves at the same time as she pursues her writing finally proves too much for LaMotte. She had told Ash that "in some of her aspects" Melusina "appears – to warn of Death" (191), like Banshees in Irish mythology, and indeed, LaMotte's association with the fairy anticipates her own downfall.

At first, LaMotte repels Ash's wooing, saying that although fairy tales have taught women to fear the dungeon, the tower or the thicket which often isolates the heroine, "it keeps us very safe – within its confines we are free" (Byatt, *Possession* 152). She writes another fairy tale, a version of the Grimms' animal-bridegroom tale "Hans My Hedgehog," with a different ending suggesting that the hero would rather have retained his animal form than been sprung from it by the love of a princess: "And if he regretted his armoury of spines and his quick wild wits, history does not relate" (60). But she subsequently emerges from her self-imposed solitude to accompany Ash to Brittany, where they consummate their relationship. Some of LaMotte's best work was produced in this period, and it is disturbing to her researchers that her poetry comes to resemble that of Ash at this time. When Maud tells Roland, "*Melusina* sounds often as though he wrote it," he says, "I don't want to think that" (288), showing how the scholars dread the

discovery that LaMotte sacrificed her individuality in succumbing to the pressure of her lover's influence.

LaMotte's union with Ash, which she entered into reluctantly, leads to her destruction in more concrete ways than alterations in her writing style. Pregnant with his child (and so, physically altered like the shape-shifting fairy she wrote about), she ends their relationship, and seems to lose hold of her sanity, refusing to acknowledge the pregnancy to relatives. Her cousin Sabine sees that LaMotte has "somehow fatally split in two, and that she has not let her conscience and public self know what is about to happen to her" (Byatt, *Possession* 402). Ash is not the only person LaMotte rejects: she gives her daughter to her sister's family to raise, where the child is visited briefly by her father on one occasion only, related in a poignant postscript; and LaMotte's friend Blanche – likely her lover as well – drowns herself when she learns that she has been abandoned for Ash. The conflict between individuality and community that dominated LaMotte's existence ruins several lives, therefore, without finding a resolution. Ash's wife also learns about the affair and suffers in silence. The ending to the novel, meanwhile, suggests that Roland and Maud will stay together despite the demands of their careers, so that the troubled and doomed affair of Ash and LaMotte may find a sort of renewal in the love of their two enthusiasts.

Animal-bridegroom fairy tales are most often seen to highlight the protagonist's discovery that a lover – and not their own self – is more complex than was at first imagined. Fairy tales are filled with incidents where a hero is humbled to learn that another person is more than they at first appeared, that a "nasty frog" is really "a prince with kind and beautiful eyes," as the revelation is described in the Grimms' "The Frog

King, or Iron Heinrich." Iona and Peter Opie argue that people misinterpret fairy tales when they say "it was just like a fairy tale" in encountering some remarkable success, for the tales are about "reality made evident" (Opies 13) in their view:

> In the most-loved fairy tales, it will be noticed, noble personages may be brought low by fairy enchantment or by human beastliness, but the lowly are seldom made noble. The established order is not stood on its head. Snow White and Sleeping Beauty are girls of royal birth. Cinderella was tested, and found worthy of her prince. The magic in the tales (if magic is what it is) lies in people and creatures being shown to be what they really are. The beggar woman at the well is really a fairy, the beast in "Beauty and the Beast" is really a monarch, the frog is a handsome prince, the corpse of Snow White a living princess. Fairy tales are unlike popular romances in that they are seldom the enactment of dream-wishes. We would ourselves be willing to face the hazards the heroes have to face, even if we were certain, as the heroes are not, of final reward. (Opies 14)

W.R.S. Ralston agrees that in "Cinderella," for example, "The supernatural element plays . . . but a subordinate part." Since Cinderella is only accepted by the prince as a bride after he has seen her in her degraded position at home, the tale implies that "even without the aid of a fairy godmother, the neglected heroine might have been enabled . . . to win the heart of the hero by the beauty of her features and the smallness of her foot" (Ralston 32-33). This dimension of animal-bridegroom tales – that they illuminate mistakes we make in our perceptions of others – informs Murdoch's novel *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983). In that novel, George McCaffrey thinks of himself as a beast and a bad man, and manages to persuade others that this is true through a campaign of

misbehaviour, when the novel's ending suggests that he has simply been misunderstood, and that he has misunderstood himself as well. In the course of acquiring this better knowledge of himself, George is compelled to reconsider his responsibilities to the tightly knit community of the spa town of Ennistone, and to weigh them against the selfish indulgences which have characterized his life up to that time.

As the novel opens, George is driving himself and his wife Stella home from visiting his mother, when, having had too much to drink at dinner and having lost his job that day, he argues with Stella, striking her, and the car veers off the road into the canal. Stella is injured and has to be transported to hospital. George, as it turns out, has a serious problem with rage, described by other characters as "tantrums" (Murdoch, *Philosopher's* 11) or "temperament" (31). When the accident occurs, he is having "one of his rages" (1), having been fired that morning from the museum after smashing its precious collection of Roman glass in "a fit of rage" (2). He threatens his wife repeatedly in the car, although his threats sound like an acknowledgment that he is unable to control himself, as when he demands, "Why don't you go away before I kill you?" (4). The accident may not be so accidental after all, but an attempt to wipe them both out, for it is clear that if George treats other people badly, it is because he loathes himself. He tries to get Stella to say that she hates him, and when she responds with love it enrages him further. "Oh, it's all so black, so black," he tells her before the accident. "Why don't you go away?" (3). And his long-suffering wife, for once, has had enough of George, and moves out of the house when she is released from hospital. It takes the rest of the novel for him to get her back, and he can only save his marriage by changing his personality. The degree to which he succeeds in this is not fully resolved by Murdoch's ending.

"A kind of beastliness possessed George" after his wife moved out, "a wanton slovenliness, which was necessary to his way of life" without her (Murdoch, *Philosopher's* 220). George is repeatedly described as bestial at this point in the novel, after he has withdrawn into a sulking solitude. Diane, a prostitute whom George "keeps" in a flat across town, knows better than anyone that "men were beasts" (65). In various places in the novel, George is said to be a howling dog (6), yelping (8), crazy as a fox (11), "red-lipped, with sharp wolfish teeth" (36), a bull (63), a "wild beastie . . . padding and pacing" (70). He is "a quarry to be killed" (71), "loping on dark paws" (119). He "shook himself like a dog" (141), is "a little miserable bedraggled animal" (180-181), sleeps in an animal's lair (220), is a "dull dog" (224), with "an animally smell" (248). He is "silent as a fox" (304), a "strong wild animal" (305), a "terrible huge deadly animal" (305), a dog (356), a manatee, a big wet sea animal, a monster (360). He has hands "like some animal's" (371), "like a large animal" (392), is guilty of "beastly crimes" and is rabid (495), is "like a dog that bites" (504), "just a bad-tempered dog" (505). His sister-in-law Gabriel is one of numerous women in the town who fantasize about taming George, who believe that he "could be changed by love" (47), but, as it turns out, George himself has to manage the metamorphosis from beast to prince that will connect him more closely with his community.

After George's destructive rage at the museum, he sees his firing as "[s]pite against George followed; things always ended in spite against George." He thought, "Perhaps he ought to appeal" his firing (Murdoch, *Philosopher's* 7). A major obstacle to George becoming a more likable person is his repeated failure to take responsibility for what happens to him – a serious crime in Murdoch's universe, where a Kantian personal

ethic dominates characters. On this theme in her work, Murdoch has remarked:

> Kant's moral philosophy rests on the idea of recognition of duty and the notion that this is a rational thing, that it is something that everybody can do, and that the unconditional nature of duty is something which is self-evident to every rational being, in fact to every human being if they are not mad or something. I am inclined to think this. This, of course, is a very unpopular view now, all kinds of ethical relativism are popular. (Bigsby, Interview 220)

George McCaffrey's failure exists in his imagining "a cleavage between himself and the George who did things" (14). Instead, he blames others. He accuses his gentle wife of mistreating him, when it is clear it is the other way around, telling her, "If I'd married a sweet kind woman I'd be a different man" (3). He accuses fate, thinking, "God I am unlucky" (7). Stella has always felt that "not blaming George will somehow make him improve" (11), and Gabriel tells her husband, "I really do think we should take some sort of collective responsibility for George" (50). But Brian objects, "Women always want to rescue men, to save them from themselves, or help them to find themselves, or something." He proposes instead, only half-joking, "George needs electric shocks and some of his brain removing" (50). Really, George just needs to accept himself for who he is, and to learn to take responsibility for how his actions affect others.

Murdoch has said, "I think that people create myths about themselves and are then dominated by the myths. They feel trapped . . . . I think that this mythology is often very deep and very influential and secretive, and a novelist is revealing secrets of this sort" (Bellamy 138). George's avoiding responsibility to the community amounts to a rejection of reality, in Murdoch's view. Throughout the novel, he is described as out of

touch with the real world. His brother Brian says that George has "lost all sense of ordinary reality" (Murdoch, *Philosopher's* 51). Father Bernard, a friend of the family, calls George an "apparition . . . . unreal. Made of ectoplasm" (89). But more than anyone, George is out of touch with himself. He tells his former professor, Rozanov, that often "my sense of individuality goes," and that in Rozanov's company he feels "more real than I've felt in years" (145). He often wonders whether the things that happen to him are "fantasy or 'real,' whatever these terms might mean" (220). He thinks, it's "becoming harder and harder to communicate with anyone" (248). He regularly experiences a "loss of identity" (398). The narrator tells us that "George, more than most people, lived by an idea of himself which was in some ways significantly at odds with reality." Having a wife and a mistress has made him "an expert and dedicated liver of the double life" (73).

His sister-in-law Gabriel has always believed that George's "awfulness is an appeal for love" (Murdoch, *Philosopher's* 47), while his wife Stella "imagined that her love would cure him" (11). Unlike the fairy-tale prince, however, who is rescued from his bestial enchantment by a woman's love, George has to heal himself. Throughout his life, people have made excuses for George's violent and selfish behaviour. Even his friends in university thought he was the victim of "frustrated ambition" (75), because he had wanted to be a writer, and had not realized the dream. George is seemingly transformed, at last, by a strange incident that permits him to take responsibility before the community and to surrender it simultaneously. He believes that he has killed Rozanov, after his former teacher wrote him a letter making it clear that he wanted to have nothing more to do with George. Subsequently, George learns that Rozanov was

already dead of an overdose when, blinded by rage, George broke into his hotel room and held him underwater in the tub. In a state of crisis, George wanders onto the plains surrounding the town, where there is a mysterious circle of ancient stones. For the first time, he experiences real remorse: "He felt the pain beginning; it was starting to spread inside him, the crippling awful pain of absolute remorse; and he prayed oh forgive me, oh let me die now" (556).

In a way George does die there, because the experience seemingly leaves him a changed man. He has a vision of an eclipse and a flying saucer, which renders him temporarily blind. When he recovers his vision, he feels transformed. He tells his mistress Diane, "You just have to get to breaking point and break, it's as simple as that" (Murdoch, *Philosopher's* 462). Now he feels that he has undergone a "change of being" (460), that he has been "remade" (461) and "changed" (501). His mother feels that "some revolution is accomplished" (502) in George. He imagines, "I am switched over into a completely new mode of being" (556). Stella and George are reunited as husband and wife at the novel's end, and George later shows a "touching" kindness to his mother after a bad fall leaves her bedridden. Evidently, George is "a changed, and still changing man" (565). "It's sad in a way," says his sister-in-law Gabriel, "our monsters are quite tame now" (573).

Throughout Murdoch's novel, however, it is suggested that rather than requiring transformation, George was never a beast to begin with – he only feared that he was. Characters debate whether George is evil, or if he is "like everyone else, only in his case it shows" (Murdoch, *Philospher's* 40). With George, "[p]eople sensed a monster, no doubt they wanted a monster" (47). There are "legends" about George's awfulness (389).

Father Bernard observes that people "like to have a scapegoat, to have someone at hand who is officially more sinful than they are" (47), and George seems to have filled that role. Gabriel wonders, "Perhaps he's made worse by our opinions" (47). But it is also true that George has encouraged these opinions of him. "Oh, you torment me so" he accuses his wife, and she replies, "You torment yourself" (2), which seems to have been the case. Perhaps George was "not as bad as he pretended to be, or as he really believed himself to be" (73). Rozanov tells George that he is "pretending to be wicked because you're unhappy" (224). By the novel's end George has had to reassess the extent to which his identity is tied up with the community's impressions of him as a sinful man.

Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's novel *The Robber Bride* (1993) and American writer Eudora Welty's novel *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942) use the Grimms' tale "The Robber Bridegroom" to explore this idea of beasts not being as intimidating as they initially appeared. The fairy tale itself does not really suggest this, although like many tales, it has duplicity as a central theme. In "The Robber Bridegroom," a beautiful miller's daughter is promised in marriage to a wealthy stranger whom she does not love or trust. Discovering that he is a murderer, she exposes her husband before the community at their wedding breakfast. In Atwood's *The Robber Bride* (1993), as the title of the novel suggests, it is a woman who is given the role of villain – Zenia, the sexy, deceitful, dangerous college acquaintance of three other women brought together in a revenge pact when she steals their husbands and boyfriends, one after the other. For all the intimate involvement she has had with their lives, the three women do not really know who Zenia is, and by the novel's end, the reader has been encouraged, in a number of ways, to reassess Zenia's status as villain. Throughout the novel, she is associated,

like the villain in the Grimms' "The Robber Bridegroom," with deception and illusion, but the deception proves to have as much to do with her friends being oblivious to obvious signals as it does with Zenia's intentions. "As with any magician," considers Tony, one of the three women, "you saw what you yourself wanted to see" (Atwood, *Robber* 535). This is certainly true with regards to the duplicity of the women's lovers. The three friends realize that they have been too quick to blame Zenia, and not their straying partners, for the affairs that ruined their marriages. Another aspect of their relationship with Zenia that detracts somewhat from her supposed villainy is the fact that the women, struggling throughout the novel to develop their own sense of identity, secretly admire her for her "malign vitality" (11). Roz admits that "sometimes she would like to be Zenia" (457). The object of grudging admiration, perhaps Zenia is not such a villain after all, unlike the fairy-tale murderer referenced by the title of Atwood's novel.

The Grimms' tale gets similar treatment in American writer Eudora Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942). In the fairy tale, the bride's suspicions about her intended are confirmed in the worst possible way, but in Welty's novel, a supposedly bad man is revealed to be good at heart. In the novel, which is narrated like a fairy tale but set in Mississippi's past, a pioneer wilderness planter's beautiful daughter, Rosamond, falls in love with a notorious local bandit, Jamie Lockhart. Jamie dresses like a New Orleans dandy, but he carries a raven on his shoulder which croaks out the warning of the bird in the Grimms' "The Robber Bridegroom," saying, "Turn again, my bonny, Turn away home." Rosamond knows that Jamie is a bandit, and she does not mind. After he "robbed her" of her virginity in the forest near her father's house, Rosamond moves into Jamie's house in the woods, where she happily cooks and cleans for him and his band of

robbers. It was a life "like fairyland" for Rosamond, although, rather like animal bridegrooms in some fairy tales, Jamie is only "kind and sweet" (Welty, *Robber* 82) by day, continuing his violent robberies by night. Rosamond accepts Jamie because she shares the suspicions of the heroine in the Grimms' "The Robber Bridegroom" that there is more to her husband, although in Jamie's case it is a good heart, and not a black one, that she imagines him hiding. Her attempts to discover his true identity prompt him to throw her out, but at the novel's end he reconsiders his ways, taking a legitimate job as a merchant and taking Rosamond as his wife. "All his wild ways had been shed like a skin," in an echo of transformations of beasts into handsome princes in fairy tales, "and he could not be kinder to her than he was" (183). However, the narrator implies that Jamie's transformation "had been almost too easy to count it a change at all" (184), suggesting that, as Rosamond has suspected, Jamie was never a true villain in the first place. Indeed, "in his heart Jamie knew that he was a hero and had always been one, only with the power to look both ways and to see a thing from all sides" (185).

In Drabble's *The Witch of Exmoor* (1996), Frieda Haxby's attempts to see a thing from all sides – to reconcile her innate eccentricity with the demands of community – lead to her sudden death, although the novel's ending celebrates what might otherwise figure as a tragedy. The novel describes a group of middle-aged, middle-class, educated, successful siblings, the Haxbys: Daniel, a lawyer; Rosemary, a neurologist; and their sister Grace, an executive in charge of arts funding. Although they possess money and taste, none of the three Haxby siblings is really happy. The secret to happiness is known only to their elderly mother, Frieda – the "witch" of the novel's title – a writer and an unconventional woman as embarrassed by her children's normalcy as they are by her

weirdness. Fairy tales come into play when Frieda's granddaughter Emily, looking after her house following her grandmother's disappearance, rescues a deer from the hunt when the animal leaps through the open window into her arms. In the course of her encounter with the deer, Emily meets the first man to interest her as a partner, a news photographer following the hunt. The sequence that puts the deer and the woman in the house together recalls the Grimms' tale "Brother and Sister," where a girl shares a cottage in the forest with her brother after he is magically transformed into a deer. Because of the intimacy of the siblings, "Brother and Sister" can be associated with the animal-bridegroom cycle of fairy tales. "Brother and Sister" helps to illuminate the sense that Frieda has of being torn between two dimensions of her life, just as animal bridegrooms are split between the animal and the human. In Frieda's case, the major conflict in her life has been between individuality and community. The novel explores what Gail Cunningham sees as a major theme of Drabble's later novels: "the more searching questions . . . about the relationship of the individual – particularly the female – to society" (Cunningham 141).

In "Brother and Sister," two children abused by the stepmother leave home together to make a better life for themselves. They end up in the forest, which the reader of fairy tales knows will be stocked with trials of their goodness and maturity. The brother is tempted to drink from an enchanted stream, which only the sister can hear issuing the warning, "Whoever drinks of me will be turned into a tiger." Fearing her brother's ferocity if he were transformed, the heroine begs him not to drink and he complies, but by the time they reach the third stream, he can no longer resist, and drinking from it, he is transformed into a deer. The two come across an abandoned house and shelter there together, with the sister spending her days gathering food, and the

brother offering his back as a pillow during the nights. Strangely enough, they are happy "all alone in the wilderness," and we are told that "it would have been a wonderful life" if only the brother could have regained his human form.

One day the local king leads his hunt through the area, and the brother not being able to resist the sound of the horns, he is chased and discovered using a password to enter the house in the woods. This happens three times, the brother being wounded on the third, when the king follows him to the house and uses the password to enter. The king falls in love with the sister and proposes to her. She accepts, but insists that her brother – obviously the object of a greater passion on her part – be permitted to live with them at the castle. Upon the birth of the queen's first child, the wicked stepmother re-enters the story. It turns out that she was the one who enchanted the streams in the forest, but her hatred of her children has not been satisfied by the brother's transformation. She and her ugly biological daughter suffocate the queen and the ugly daughter takes her place in the marriage bed. Not even death can diminish the queen's sense of duty, however, so that she appears in the bedroom three nights in a row to nurse her child and stroke her brother. On the third night the king witnesses this and restores the heroine to life by identifying her as his true bride. The wicked stepmother is burned to death and her daughter meets a fate the heroine had feared – she is torn to pieces by wild beasts in the forest. When this justice is meted out, the brother regains his human form.

Drabble's use of the Grimms' story "Brother and Sister" in *The Witch of Exmoor* is obviously guided by psychoanalytical readings. We are told that Frieda understands fairy tales because she had "read her Bettelheim, long ago" (Drabble, *Witch* 117). Bruno Bettelheim said that when a fairy tale describes the adventures of siblings, often the

protagonists represent "seemingly incompatible aspects of the human personality" (Bettelheim 90) and "the main message is that these must be integrated for human happiness" (78). That this is a central theme in fairy tales is evidenced by the number of Grimms' tales involving siblings, among them, "The Twelve Brothers," "Brother Lustig," "The Devil's Sooty Brother," "The Three Brothers," "The Four Skilful Brothers" and "The Three Sisters." That siblings in fairy tales represent one split personality is made most clear by the Grimms' tale "The Two Brothers," with the numerous parallels established between its sibling protagonists. In that story, twin brothers thrust a knife into a tree when they part ways, so that each will be able to determine the other's success by looking at his side of the knife, and seeing if it is rusted or not. The brothers have similar adventures, each of them assisted by a hare, a fox, a wolf and a bear they spared when they were out hunting together. When one brother must sleep with the other's wife, he puts a double-edged sword in the bed between them so that they will both remain faithful. The similarities in the brothers' experiences in this story strengthen the interpretation that they represent aspects of the same person.

Bettelheim has noted, "if the contradictory aspects of the personality remain separated from each other, nothing but misery is the consequence" (Bettelheim 96). In "Brother and Sister," the heroine makes her acceptance of the local king's marriage proposal conditional on her brother accompanying her to the palace. She says, "I won't ever forsake him," and the king reassures her, "he shall want for nothing." Bettelheim notes, "But before we can achieve mature integration of our personality, we have to struggle through many developmental crises" (Bettelheim 89). In "Brother and Sister," such crises are highlighted when the deer outruns the hunt three times, and at the end of

the tale, when the sister returns from the dead three times to nurse her child, until the king's recognition of her as his true bride finally restores her to life. Bettelheim refers to the Grimms' "Brother and Sister" as evidence that often one sibling in a fairy tale is cautious and reasonable while the other is a risk-taker, such that "the two figures symbolize opposite aspects of our nature, impelling us to act in contrary ways" (Bettelheim 91). In "Brother and Sister," the brother is transformed into a deer because he can not resist, as his sister can, drinking from an enchanted stream.

Much like Melanie Snyder in American writer Joyce Carol Oates's story "The Buck," which, as we saw in Chapter Three, also makes use of "Brother and Sister," Frieda Haxby in *The Witch of Exmoor* has been disappointed by the world so many times that she has given it up as a lost cause. Having become more and more disenchanted over the years with society's predilection for tacky commerce, processed food and conventional thinking, Frieda has withdrawn to a lonely house in the country to write her memoirs. As she tells her bewildered children, "I'm off . . . . I resign . . . . I leave it all to you . . . . I've had enough" (Drabble, *Witch* 43-44). Living happily by herself in a rundown house between the sea and the moor, Frieda generates a certain amount of local interest, and causes her children no end of concern and embarrassment. Professionally employed in London, they reject Frieda's encouragement of what Bettelheim calls "opposite aspects of our nature, impelling us to act in contrary ways" (Bettelheim 91). They send various relatives to check up on Frieda, but each is routed by her hostility. Then when Frieda mysteriously disappears (having, as they subsequently learn, either jumped or fallen from a cliff to her death), her granddaughter Emily, an opinionated young woman who has much in common with Frieda, is sent to look after the empty

house. While she is there, Emily has a strange encounter with a deer escaping hunters through her window. The leaping deer becomes an important symbol not just to Emily but to other sympathetic characters in the novel who embrace its meaning, directing them along a route to happiness which so far only Frieda has been willing or able to travel.

When Frieda retreats to Exmoor, she enters a fairy-tale realm. Her sprawling house is a "castle by the sea," a "fortress" and a "cavern" (Drabble, *Witch* 66). She enjoys walking in the "ancient woodland" nearby. In the distance she can see the "enchanted palace" of the chemical factory (72). Although there are rumours of a Beast that roams the moor killing sheep, Frieda's fairy-tale setting is generally peaceful. Her children nevertheless insist on identifying her with fairy-tale villains rather than heroes. They take to calling her "the witch of Exmoor," the "wicked godmother" (50), a "bad fairy" (185), and a devouring giant (100). This is not the only problematic relationship Frieda has had to deal with. Like the children in "Brother and Sister," who leave home because they can no longer endure the cruelty of their stepmother, Frieda grew up resenting her mother, an angry and vindictive woman. The fathers in fairy tales are generally weak or absent, and in the same way, Frieda's father, a kind farmer who sat by her bedside and carved wooden animals for her when she was ill, had no defence against her mother's temper. Agonizing over this part of her memoirs, Frieda imagines that her story might be easier to tell if she told it as a fairy tale: "Once upon a time there were two little girls, and their names were Everhilda and Frieda Haxby" (113). It is not hard for Frieda to imagine herself and her sister as "little Grimm girls" (111), although unlike the too-fond siblings in Joyce Carol Oates's "The Buck," they possessed a "fairy tale hatred" (120) for each other; in Drabble's novel, the bond between siblings is murderous rather

than devoted.

It is not only memories of her childhood and difficulties with her judgmental children that Frieda seeks to escape in retreating to Exmoor. Her alienation from human society is also connected with her past experiences with men. Frieda's husband Andrew turned out to be a homosexual, a fact only discovered by her after he had given her three children. He had also been cheating on her with her sister for years. In spite of all of this sexual over-activity, he seems to have been compensating with quantity for what he was lacking in quality – Frieda considers that she was sexually frustrated for the duration of her marriage. She met Andrew during the war, when she was sixteen and he was in uniform, and she may have been more attracted by the office than she was by the man. The marriage itself was a mistake and a disappointment; Frieda recalls that it had left her "empty with dissatisfaction" and wondering, "Think what I might have been, might have done" (Drabble, *Witch* 247). Rather like the heroine of Oates's "The Buck," who chases hunters off her property wearing her brothers' rubber boots, upon the departure of men from her life Frieda became less conventionally feminine – she "worked like a man" (168) writing a military history entitled *The Matriarchy of War*.

Because of Frieda's tendency to ignore the prescriptions of gender, along with the social boundaries that she has disregarded in indulging her eccentricity in her country house, her children are not surprised to learn that the property is situated on a county border, a fact which generates legal problems in connection with her disappearance. One of her daughters recalls of Frieda, "She always liked margins" (Drabble, *Witch* 167). The deer that enters Frieda's house in her absence is also crossing a margin, from its own familiar world into an alien, human space. In doing so, it becomes a symbol of the

courageous exploration of and indulgence of the self that might rescue people from their own unhappiness. Waking up in the house in Exmoor where she is acting as caretaker, Frieda's granddaughter Emily hears a commotion and looks out the window into a scene of chaos on the lawn – riders, horses, and hounds pouring over the hill – and out of it "a red deer leaps the urned parapet, and crashes across the lawn, and clears the window-sill, and bounds into the arms of Emily Palmer" (253). The leap into her arms connects the scene with Oates's story, where Melanie opens her arms to embrace the buck before it charges her. The embrace also connects both stories with Grimms' "Brother and Sister," where the sister and her transformed brother share a physical intimacy like that of lovers: "At night, when the sister was tired and had said her prayers, she would lay her head on the back of the fawn. That was her pillow, and she would fall into a sweet sleep. If only the brother could have regained his human form, it would have been a wonderful life."

In Drabble's novel, unlike the fairy tale, the deer is female, a fact which is emphasized by its obvious pregnancy. However, this can only strengthen the interpretation that the deer represents an essential part of the self that unhappy characters have failed to indulge. Having routed the hunt, shouting, "You must be mad! I'll have you all for trespass! And get those dogs off my roof!" (Drabble, *Witch* 254), Emily, in her animation, even resembles the red deer: "She is panting, slightly, with excitement. Her nostrils are dilated, her colour high, her eyes brilliant" (256). When the huntsmen, unable to persuade Emily to surrender the quarry, depart from Frieda's lawn, they leave behind Jim, a young news photographer who has been following the hunt and documenting its activities. He persuades Emily to let him stay and help her with the deer before animal-control officers arrive. Jim and Emily experience a moment of mutual

attraction right out of fairy-tale courtship: "They gaze at one another, astonished. The young man lifts his camera at her, lets it fall. He is open, eager, unwary. He has learnt no guile. Is he, perhaps, the one?" (256). Jim takes in the "beautiful maiden" with her "golden mane" (257) and falls instantly in love. Emily's indulgence of her impulsive, animal side, evident throughout the novel in her consistent challenging of authority as it is in her rejection of the gallant, red-coated "Master of the Staghounds," has put her into a position to enjoy all of life's possibilities.

A similar disregard of rules motivated Frieda's move to the country, and perhaps even her suicidal leap, if leap she did. Throughout the novel, the deer's leap reappears as a symbol of necessary daring. Although the novel is unequivocal in its treatment of Frieda's possible suicide as heroic, the event calls into question the merits of what Frieda has learned about happiness necessitating a rejection of community values. Frieda must have fallen or jumped from a path along the top of the cliff known as Hindspring Walk, after a legendary deer pursued by hunters which leapt into the sea rather than be captured. Hearing of this and of the three stones that had been raised to "commemorate her valour" (Drabble, *Witch* 259), Emily wonders what monument she should raise to her grandmother who was lost from the same point. A valorous leap is a good representation of Frieda's character, with her lack of concern for the opinions of others, her defiance of rules and her courage to take action to make her life better – or to end it, if she felt such a need. Frieda's son considers that if she jumped to her death, "[s]uch a leap would have been in character. She had a habit of taking precipitate action, of meeting trouble before it met her" (202). Frieda's daughter compares her mother to the deer – inadvertently, perhaps – when she contemplates Frieda's drive to better her life: Frieda "had broken

away into freedom" (96) from a repressive childhood; somehow she had "managed to break away and run off" (97). That Frieda's escape route ends at a cliff side is a good example of the lack of resolution in Drabble's endings, which have attracted a certain amount of critical attention, some of it disapproving.

Murdoch's novel *The Philosopher's Pupil* forgives "the frailty of everything," the "little vulnerable places" (Murdoch, *Philosopher's* 9) in things and in people. Father Bernard says, in Murdoch's novel, "We are frail human creatures, all our good is mixed with evil." But, he insists, "It is good nonetheless" (509). Like Jamie Lockhart in Eudora Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom*, who has "the power to look both ways," like Frieda Haxby and her granddaughter Emily in Drabble's *The Witch of Exmoor* and like Zenia in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*, Murdoch's George McCaffrey proves to be a very human combination of virtue and vice, after all. The use of animal-bridegroom fairy tales in these novels establishes protagonists in the middle of a conflict between responsibilities to the community and the attractions of solitude. Drabble highlighted this conflict between selfhood and community when she said in an interview, "You're here in order to do the right thing and to seek the depths in yourself which aren't necessarily very happy" (Cooper-Clark 20). In the three novels that I have examined in this chapter, references to animal-bridegroom fairy tales illustrate how difficult it can be for characters in this fiction to manage the two things at once – to please themselves while responding to the humanizing demands of community life.

Chapter Six

"Briar Rose" II

"Briar Rose," the Grimms' fairy tale about the sleeping princess who wakes up when she is kissed by a prince, might be seen as describing not just romantic love but a renewal of energies. Folklorist Jack Zipes points out that in fairy tales, the protagonist is often an artist – a tailor, for instance – in search of a new world where they will be able to develop and enjoy their talents (Zipes, *Breaking* 34-35). Other tales, he says, "place a high regard on the freedom of the creative individual" (35). And all fairy tales, according to Zipes, inevitably reveal "the imagination actively serving the general struggle" (40). In three of the novels by Iris Murdoch that we examined in Chapter Four, characters whose romances bear comparison to the story of the Grimms' Briar Rose – their version of the better-known French heroine Sleeping Beauty – subsequently awaken to new creative possibilities in their lives. In *Bruno's Dream* (1968), loving his wife's sister Lisa, although she ends up marrying his brother-in-law, enables Miles Greensleave to write poetry again. In *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), loving Tuan inspires Rosalind Berran to paint. In *The Black Prince* (1973), loving his friend's twenty-year-old daughter Julian enables Bradley Pearson, a divorced, bitter, unsuccessful novelist, to write a good novel – apparently, the one by Murdoch that he narrates. In "Briar Rose," which angers some readers in its seeming equation of female sexuality and passivity, Zipes points out that "there are signs here and there that the oral tale with the sleeping beauty motif may have come from a tradition of resurrection, from a reawakening" (Zipes, *Brothers* 152).

Novels by Murdoch, Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt use "Briar Rose" to

describe women who see advantages in remaining within a circumscribed existence, although there is no lack of princely suitors available to show them the way out. The isolation of the character seems, in fact, to have less to do with relationships than it does with nameless anxieties about living amid the pressures of the modern world. Opportunities exist whereby they might renew themselves, but they choose, at least temporarily, to withdraw into isolation and stasis. Thus an ambiguity is introduced into these writers' use of the fairy tale. In Drabble's novel *The Realms of Gold* (1975), Frances Wingate, a world-famous archaeologist who has succeeded in her career despite the constraints imposed by an unhappy childhood, is plagued by depression, which she likens to a "stone in my chest" (Drabble, *Realms* 204). Feeling that the important stages of her life – marriage and motherhood – are over, Frances is tempted to withdraw into solitude, although her on again, off again romance with Karel, a married history teacher, offers her a richer existence. In Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Maud Bailey, a beautiful and renowned English scholar, is sometimes overwhelmed by the pressures of academia so that she fantasizes about "[a]n empty bed in an empty room" (Byatt, *Possession* 291), a vision that anticipates suicide elsewhere in Byatt's fiction. If solitude puts pressure on her, however, Maud is just as anxious about starting a relationship with Roland, a fellow scholar, imagining that he poses a threat to her autonomy. In Murdoch's *The Unicorn* (1963), Hannah Crean-Smith married the man that she loved and moved into his country house, but guilt over an extramarital affair that he discovered has kept her a prisoner there. Attempts to forcibly remove Hannah lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of recrimination and murder. It appears that not only has Hannah become accustomed to her solitude, she enjoys the power that such a degree of self-sacrifice affords her. Each

character has already achieved success according to her own standards, but has now reached a point where she feels that she can advance no farther. Drabble has emphasized the connection between morality and action by referring in interviews to "the moral effort," and indicating that she is interested in exploring in her novels why people "don't fight back when they've made the wrong choices," why they can not "endeavour in the face of the impossible" (Cooper-Clark 26). While protagonists who take on the world are generally rewarded by these novelists, these three works remind the reader of how much those characters have to contend with, when obstacles are comprised of their own attitudes rather than physical realities.

Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt have made morality and concomitant human action a central focus of their work. This is not to say that their novels depict an idealized world where nothing bad ever happens – quite the contrary, in fact. Characters in novels by Drabble and Byatt are given to despairing about the state of England, so that the happy ones among them could be defined as "a freak escape from the general doom" (Drabble, *Middle* 15), as Kate Armstrong's friend Hugo describes her in Drabble's *The Middle Ground* (1980). Byatt's characters can also be monstrous in their cruelty; she acknowledged in an interview that the writings of de Sade influenced her 1996 novel *Babel Tower* (Miller). Murdoch and Drabble have each written one novel virtually bereft of optimism: Murdoch's *The Time of the Angels* (1966) tells of the suicide of a defrocked priest following years of sexual abuse of his daughter, and Drabble's *The Ice Age* (1977) uses the phrase, "These are terrible times we live in" (Drabble, *Ice* 10), to introduce us to characters struggling under the economic collapse in Britain in the mid-1970s. It is not, therefore, that the world depicted by these authors is a beautiful place. What sets them

apart from their contemporaries in modern British fiction is the determination of their protagonists to do something about the circumstances of their lives, even if it means contending against seemingly insurmountable odds. Sarah Bennett, in Drabble's second novel, *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963), considers herself and her sister "high-powered girls" (Drabble, *Summer* 96), even though they are both familiar with "how difficult it was to get anything" (61), to have a lover and yet be taken seriously as an intelligent woman, to "[h]ave one's cake and eat it" (60).

Novels by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt share a feature of fairy tales identified by folklorist Jack Zipes: "The emphasis is on hope and action" (Zipes, *Breaking* 33) in fairy tales, Zipes said, even if most protagonists are aware they can only achieve "limited victories" (31) against the forces which oppress them. What is important is not whether they win or lose, but that "[t]he solider and his friends *act* and *defeat* the king whenever they are tested. Hansel and Gretel *act* and *kill* the witch" (33). In the same way, these novelists highlight the importance of taking action to improve our lives. Frederica Potter, the protagonist of three novels by Byatt, is characterized by "generalized determination" (Byatt, *Still* 147), is described as an "intellectual shark" (68) and a boa constrictor (77), driven as she is to identify herself as one of the "flaming Potters" like her opinionated father, not "the other sort – the sort that stops and suffers" (59). Later, Frederica experiences her share of suffering, including an abusive husband and a divorce, as we saw in Chapter Three of this essay, but her determination fuels an important journey of self-discovery.

Iona and Peter Opie argue that the Grimm brothers' "Dornroschen," or "Briar Rose," also known as "Little Briar Rose," was "undoubtedly derived from" French

folklorist Charles Perrault's "La Belle au bois dormant" ("The sleeping Beauty in the woods"), the first tale in Perrault's 1697 *Histoire ou Contes du temps passé* (Opies 102). But as was discussed in Chapter Four, the story of the sleeping princess existed long before Perrault wrote down his version. In the Grimms' "Briar Rose," a king and queen neglect to invite one of the kingdom's thirteen "wise women" to a celebration of the birth of a long-wished-for daughter. The slighted wise woman avenges the insult by cursing the child: "In her fifteenth year the princess shall prick herself with a spindle and fall down dead!" The curse is subsequently modified by another wise woman to plunge the girl into a hundred-year sleep. Although her father the king destroys all the spinning wheels he can find, Briar Rose meets her fate in a tower room in the castle where she discovers a mysterious old woman spinning, and falls into an enchanted sleep as prophesied. The whole palace also falls asleep, and a briar hedge grows around it, obscuring it from view. Various princes try to rescue Briar Rose and become trapped in the thorns. A prince arriving on the day that the hundred-year curse expires finds that the hedge is full of flowers, and that it opens to let him in. He discovers Briar Rose asleep in the small tower room, admires her beauty, and kisses her, whereupon she awakens, along with the rest of the palace, and marries the prince.

The Grimms' tale "Briar Rose" is useful to these novelists in its depiction of a heroine rising up from an enchanted sleep to take action. Because the action she takes is marrying her rescuing prince, many readers have been persuaded that the tale equates female consciousness with marriage, a theme which is troubling to some. For Francine Prose, "Briar Rose" describes "a sort of modified necrophilia" (Prose 287). Folklorist Jack Zipes says that one of the "mythic messages" of this tale is that while "[w]omen are

indeed helpless without men . . . generally catatonic or comatose, eternally waiting," by contrast, "[m]ale energy and will power can restore anything to life" (Zipes, *Brothers* 152). Ruth Bottigheimer, in her book *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys* (1987), which examines gender bias in the tales, commits a chapter entitled "Towers, Forests and Trees" to female imprisonment in the Grimms' tales. Bottigheimer suggests, "The single most pervasive image provoked in the popular mind by the word *fairy tale* is probably that of a maiden in distress leaning from a tower window and searching the horizon for a rescuer" (Bottigheimer 101). She reviews Grimms' tales which feature women "immured, incarcerated or sequestered" in towers, glass coffins, briar hedges, huts, mountains, tree branches, forests and their husband's castles. Bottigheimer concludes, "Isolation in the Grimms' tales, like silence, has a female face" (111). But Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt do not use "Briar Rose" to depict the rescue of a helpless female. Although the characters they compare to the tale's heroine are all involved with men – and Murdoch's Hannah Crean-Smith is in fact fixated on her marriage – they have other motivations besides matrimony in entertaining the surrender of a circumscribed existence and a participation in the larger community.

Despite the angry response that the tale generates in some readers, "Briar Rose" and its variants, which, as we saw in Chapter Four, date back to at least the twelfth century, inspire folklorists and fairy-tale critics with their optimistic message. Fairy tales, says Jungian Marie-Louise von Franz, provide "a model for living, an encouraging, vivifying model which reminds one unconsciously of all life's positive possibilities" (Von Franz, *Interp.* 63). Jack Zipes shares this expansive view when he says that "Most of all," fairy tales "provide hope that there is more to life than mastering the art of

survival" (Zipes, Intro. xxxi). Zipes sees a better world outlined for the heroine of "Briar Rose" even while she undertakes the more essential fight against death:

> Sleeping Beauty is not only about female and male stereotypes and male hegemony, it is also about death, our fear of death, and our wish for immortality. Sleeping Beauty is resurrected. She triumphs over death. As the eternal briar rose, she rises from the dead to love and to fulfil her desires. The rising from the dead is an uprising, an attack on the borders of mortality. After her uprising, Sleeping Beauty will know how to avoid danger and death . . . . Once awakened, Sleeping Beauty is the knowing one, and we know, too. (Zipes, *Brothers* 153)

The journey of the sleeping princess from death through life inspires Marina Warner, whose book *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994) focuses on metamorphosis as a theme in fairy tales. In their penchant for shape-shifting and uncovering disguise, she says (and, one might add, their waking up from enchantment), fairy-tale heroes and heroines "disrupt the apprehensible world in order to open spaces for dreaming alternatives" (Warner xvi). Meanwhile, the knowledge which Zipes sees the heroine gaining from her enchanted sleep in "Briar Rose" is the most interesting feature of fairy tales for Bruno Bettelheim, and the focus of his book, *The Uses of Enchantment* (1975). Bettelheim says, "The fairy tale begins with the hero at the mercy of those who think little of him and his abilities, who mistreat him and even threaten his life." By the tale's end, "the hero has mastered all trials and despite them remained true to himself, or in successfully undergoing them has achieved his true selfhood." In fairy tales, Bettelheim concludes, "victory is not over others but over oneself" (Bettelheim 127-128). One can see this clearly in the emergence from enchantment which is a universal theme of fairy tales;

animal-bridegroom tales furnish one example – a cycle of fairy tales, popular the world over, where women marry men who have been transformed into beasts.

The conflict with the self is a theme of these novels by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt. Bettelheim proposes that the tale of Briar Rose "tells that a long period of quiescence, of contemplation, of concentration on the self, can and often does lead to highest achievement" (Bettelheim 226). In these novels, however, characters who have already worked through problems in relationships with parents and children (Chapters One and Two) and lovers (Chapters Three and Four) are tempted finally to put such entanglements behind them and withdraw into a life of exhausted solitude. In Drabble's novels, according to Ellen Cronan Rose, moral issues are "compounded by a woman's realization that she has responsibilities to herself as well as to others" (Rose, Intro. 6). Murdoch has said that in addition to learning to treat others well, one "has a right, even a duty to be happy. For some people, happiness is part of organizing a good life" (Brans, Interview with Murdoch 190). But withdrawal from society and the privileging of the self that it implies constitutes a serious failing in Murdoch's universe, as it does for Drabble and Byatt. In Murdoch's novel *The Unicorn* (1963), Effingham has an epiphany, while sinking in a bog, that "with the death of the self the world becomes . . . the object of a perfect love" (Murdoch, *Unicorn* 189). In *The Nice and the Good* (1968), expecting to drown after becoming trapped in a sea cave with the tide changing, John Ducane realizes that "all power is sin . . . . Love is the only justice" (Murdoch, *Nice* 315). He decides that if he escapes with his life he will not prosecute a colleague in the civil service who he knows has committed a crime, because the exercise of power over others prevents him from being truly good. "The chief requirement of the good life," according

to James Tayper Pace in Murdoch's *The Bell* (1958), "is to live without any image of oneself" (Murdoch, *Bell* 131). Concentration on the self, which implies a desire to shut out the outside world and its entanglements, would not only lead to an unsatisfying life for some of these characters; according to the authors, such a retreat into the self is morally unsound.

Drabble's novel *The Realms of Gold* (1975) uses "Briar Rose" to explore the struggle for identity that women undergo as they are pulled back and forth between the conflicting demands of their lives, and the temptation that they may feel to withdraw from the conflict entirely, in mid-life. Frances Wingate, a world-famous archaeologist troubled with depression, is associated with Briar Rose throughout the novel. Her brother Hugh thinks that Frances, currently divorced, would be able to attract another husband, were it not that she "sat inside a thorny palisade of her own making, cross and contemplative, not a captive but a queen" (Drabble, *Realms* 207). As the analogy suggests, her strength and determination have been assets to Frances throughout her career, although she is beginning to realize that she has neglected other aspects of her life; flying around the world for conferences, she spends too much of her time in lonely hotel rooms. Bitterly divorced, and uncertain how to organize her life now that her children are grown, Frances struggles to come to terms with the feeling she has had since childhood that she was not valued by her parents, her father the busy vice-chancellor of a university and her mother a gynecologist with, Frances believes, some kind of sexual dysfunction. (She habitually flirted with Frances's boyfriends.) Clearly, something was wrong in the family, for Frances's younger sister Alice killed herself, and her brother Hugh is now an alcoholic.

Untroubled by modesty, Frances realizes that she has done "very well for herself" (Drabble, *Realms* 16). Listening happily to "the long list of her achievements" (19) being read out at a conference, Frances thinks, "I am a vain, self-satisfied woman" (20). Sometimes Frances feels that she "wasn't up to it" (59), living in the world, but her story is all about survival. As an archaeologist she is interested in harsh climates where people have nevertheless endured: "Too much of the world was inhospitable," she considers, "And yet here, on these steep slopes, people lived, played cards, drank beer in the small hours, perched on a gradient too perilous to contemplate, in the path of avalanches" (59). Like the tribes that she studies, Frances's success has been derived from her "amazing powers of survival and adaptation" (21). Indeed, some critics have found them too amazing, arguing that Frances's good fortune is at odds with the novel's realism. Lynn Veach Sadler remarks on the "flurry of coincidence" (Sadler 91) at the end of *The Realms of Gold*, where Frances's lover Karel Schmidt misses because of illness a flight that blows up, and then his wife Joy conveniently declares herself a lesbian and leaves him. Joanne Creighton feels that Frances is "privileged . . . unfairly blessed, look after by a beneficent destiny, and a benign narrator who pulls the strings to make all well" (Creighton, *Drabble* 89). Frances herself suffers occasionally from "anxiety" about the "seeming inevitability" of her successes in life, although during those moments, she recognizes that imagination rather than fate was behind them:

> I must be mad, she thought to herself. I imagine a city, and it exists. If I hadn't imagined it, it wouldn't have existed. All her life, things had been like that. She had imagined herself doing well at school, and had done well. Marrying, and had married. Bearing children, and had borne them. Being rich, and had become

rich. Being free, and was free. Finding true love, and had found it. Losing it, and had lost it. What next should she imagine? (24).

Ellen Cronan Rose sees such "contrivances" in *The Realms of Gold* as "vexing" (Rose, *Equivocal* 95). However, these responses to Drabble's novel ignore the obvious bravery of its heroine: "One could say this for Frances Wingate . . . she didn't care what risks she ran" (Drabble, *Realms* 18).

When her nephew Stephen, nineteen, kills himself and his infant daughter after deciding, "It was better to be dead than alive" (Drabble, *Realms* 349), he acknowledges Frances's more successful struggle against despair: "don't think I haven't been impressed by your approach" (350), he writes in his suicide note. As her lover Karel points out, trying to ease the pain Frances feels at Stephen's death, "she had clearly represented for him one of the only possible patterns of living" (352). Like the hero in another fairy tale, succeeding in spite of her origins, Frances had "climbed perilously up . . . the beanstalk . . . to the golden world above" (284). She likes a challenge, having embraced the difficulty of starting a family and a career like hers at the same time in order "to prove that it could be done" (241). She has frequently had to fight men for her success, "had pursued her career, her interests, her own self" (22) in spite of opposition from male professors, her ex-husband Anthony and male colleagues. In her marriage to Anthony, they fought a great deal because "she was not easily intimidated, she refused to submit" (22). Frances also rebels against convention in her lack of sexual inhibitions. Before Karel came along, she admits, "she found it almost impossible to stop herself sleeping with people" (30) at conferences and archaeological digs, and she still sizes up her hosts when she travels.

But Frances is unhappy despite the full life she leads. Her success loses some of its shine when she admits that she works so hard because "I've got to keep moving. I get so depressed if I don't" (Drabble, *Realms* 50). Since childhood, Frances has been troubled with the family ailment of depression, which she calls "Despair," always capitalizing it in her thoughts. Her depression comes and goes, being either "dreary" or "gripping" (11). She has tried to accept this aspect of her self as "part of a pattern," wanting to see her life as a cycle rather than "a meaningless succession of mutually exclusive absolute states" (12). Weighed down as she is by her ailment, Frances's depression is described throughout the novel as a stone in her chest, recalling the fairy-tale image of the stones sewn into the wolf's stomach in the fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood": "She felt as though she had swallowed a stone" (19); "What held her like a stone round her neck, like a stone in her chest, heavy, solid, inert?" (195); "'I've got this terrible stone in my chest . . . . It's like some kind of gravity, I can't do anything about it'" (204). Frances may also be on her way to becoming an alcoholic, like her brother Hugh. As she has herself acknowledged, her depression is linked with her feeling that she is stuck in life, with no forward movement possible. Realizing that the great achievements of her career happened years ago, Frances thinks, "No wonder she got morbid and depressed late at night; it was years since she had really got moving" (25). Her fascination with an octopus she sees at a research laboratory, where she learns that the females inevitably die after giving birth, illustrates her fears that her real achievements – marriage, motherhood and career advancement – may be behind her.

Her lack of self-confidence comes as a surprise to those who know Frances intimately. Upon meeting Frances, her cousin Janet Bird says, "I can tell from looking at

you, who you are" (Drabble, *Realms* 326). But at the start of the novel, Frances is not as confident as Janet supposes. Her self-confidence suffers most in her relationships with men. Her love affair with Karel, a married history teacher, helps Frances recover from her divorce and alleviates her depression, but she leaves him as soon as she fears that she is becoming vulnerable in the relationship. It is one of several ways – along with her drinking and her dismissal of her childhood – that Frances tries to withdraw from the pressures of living. Like many Drabble protagonists, Frances married her first husband, Anthony, knowing that the marriage was a mistake. She did not enjoy sex with her husband, and it is even suggested that she found intercourse painful, since she recited poems as "a charm against pain" while "trying to comply with her husband's desire" (57). Her experiences with Karel freed her from her negative attitude toward sex: "She had been arid as a rock, but she had learned to flow" (24). He was the first man to give her sexual pleasure, and also the first man she really loved. When she finally acknowledges her need for him, she feels her depression fading:

> She cried for quite a while, comfortably, tired. The stone in her chest was dissolving, after all: fate was on her side, after all. The tears poured down. In the morning, or the morning after, when she got back from the tin mine, she would write to Karel, she would write him a long letter, explaining how much she needed him, asking him to take her back. There was no point, no point at all, in being alone. (229)

For much of the novel, Frances insists that she does not need Karel, imagining that she "was all right on her own" (57), that she "was quite happy on her own" (64). But when they break up at one point, it is because she wants to leave Karel "before he had a chance

of leaving her" (47), since "the one experience she had tried to avoid" in her adult life was "Rejection. Betrayal. Surprise" (65). She is afraid that "she would wake up one morning . . . and find that Karel had deceived her, that he had never loved her." Frances knows that "[f]aith and certainty" are "bricks and mortar" (24) in a relationship, but she has been tormented by doubts nevertheless.

Her cousin Janet struggles to express her own conflicted feelings about identity to Frances. Unhappily married to a dull man who works in plastics in Tockley, where Frances grew up, Janet feels "inadequate in all directions" (Drabble, *Realms* 131). She tells Frances, "I mean, I feel I am myself, and that I've got to look after it. But I don't know what it is. I know it's there, that's all" (326). The Grimms' tale "Briar Rose," in which the heroine awakens to a renewed sense of her identity, serves as a model for the women in Drabble's novel. Both Frances and Janet admire Frances's great aunt Constance Ollerenshaw, who lived as a recluse in a country house, and turned away the neighbours who later found her dead with her stomach full of cardboard, presumably the victim of starvation. Janet envies Connie's determination to be herself despite what others might have thought. She says, "That's why I don't think it was at all awful about Aunt Con, she was being herself, if you know what I mean, everyone could see what she was being" (326). Visiting Connie's cottage, Janet felt that "there was something in her that loved the place. It was fierce and lonely, it was defiant" (287). Frances also sees that her aunt Connie's home, overgrown with roses "like trees, fierce and thorny" (287), is "like Sleeping Beauty's terrain" (302). There, Frances feels "curiously at home" (309), and Harold Barnard, the solicitor handling the estate, tells Frances, when he meets her, "You could have been Constance herself, 50 years younger" (310). Comparisons to

Connie and to Briar Rose imply that Frances is now in a position to resolve who she is.

When Frances buys Connie's house in her old home town to use as a summer house for herself and Karel, and the huge family they comprise with the children of their previous marriages, she is connecting herself with the childhood in Tockley which she fled, at the same time as she is strengthening the relationships that dominate her life now. Throughout the novel she has been tempted to throw off burdensome human ties for a life like that of the octopus that opens Drabble's novel; she wonders why she should be "resolved on a course of defying nature" (Drabble, *Realms* 5) when the octopus in his square plastic box was "the best thing she had seen for some time" (1). She sees that "[h]e thought he could live a full, active, healthy life in that box" (5). But soon enough, Frances realizes that a secluded existence is not fair to her or to the people she cares about, and she determines that "she would have to apply herself seriously to the business of living in the world again" (66). After trying out several different models, from being a housewife to jetting around the world to archaeological conferences rife with sexual opportunities, the life that Frances finally builds for herself allows her to engage with the world and to maintain, at the same time, the privacy that she realizes that she craves. She can still sit, if she wishes, within "a thorny palisade of her own making, cross and contemplative" (207), but she will no longer be in there alone.

The difficulty with which exhausted middle-aged protagonists in these novels find resolution to the conflicting demands of modern life can not be underestimated. Frances is one of the lucky survivors; elsewhere in Drabble's fiction, characters are less successful than she is in combining divergent aspects of their lives, and find themselves forced, like Frances's great aunt Connie, to choose between autonomy and society. Kate

Armstrong's mother in *The Middle Ground* (1980) is agoraphobic. Liz Headleand's mother, in the trilogy comprised of *The Radiant Way* (1987), *A Natural Curiosity* (1989) and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991), is a recluse with a mysterious past that her children only learn of after her death. Their childhood home in Northam was a "chrysalis" to the metamorphosing Liz but a "tomb" (Drabble, *Radiant* 121) for her mother. In *The Peppered Moth* (2001), Bessie Bawtry, a lifelong hypochondriac, retires to bed for the last half of her life and leaves her daughters to look after themselves, her daughter Chrissie seeing her mother's withdrawal as "indirect and protracted revenge for the disappointments of her own life" (Drabble, *Peppered* 160). These characters have been utterly defeated by the expectations of others and the demands that they have made of themselves.

Withdrawal from the world has also interested Byatt as a theme of her fiction. In her early novel *The Game* (1967), Cassandra Corbett, an Oxford don with a narrow academic existence which contrasts with that of her sister Julia, a successful novelist, is given the opportunity to rekindle an old romance, but decides against it. She realizes that "we are afraid of the moment when what we can imagine becomes inextricably involved in what is actual . . . limiting, actual, finally, after all, impossible." She sees that if she enters a love affair, "[n]othing will be the same. When the prince kissed the princess, the forest of brambles shrivelled and vanished" (Byatt, *Game* 201), and she decides that she would rather keep her life as it is now. A more tragic exploration of the theme is featured in Byatt's story, "The Chinese Lobster" (*The Matisse Stories*, 1993). Gerda Himmelblau, a university professor, fails to persuade her best friend Kay – the characters' first names are those of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Snow

Queen" – that ending her life is an inappropriate response to the suicide of Kay's daughter. Gerda sees that Kay, "sleepy with drugs" in the hospital after her latest suicide attempt, has already died, in a way, inside. Despite Gerda's urging that suicide is selfish, that "[y]ou can't do that to other people" (Byatt, "Chinese" 128-129), Kay has surrendered to the attraction of nothingness, which is described as a safe enclosure: "a white box, a white room, with no doors or windows," where "everything is bleached, and clear" (125).

Byatt's novel *Possession* (1990) explores these same themes and makes use of the same imagery. The novel employs a number of well-known fairy tales, along with several original tales written by its nineteenth-century heroine. In *Possession*, two post-graduate students, Roland Mitchell and Maud Bailey, uncover a secret love affair between two nineteenth-century English poets, Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte. Ash was married at the time, and LaMotte had an intimate relationship – possibly a love affair – with a woman painter who lived with her. As Roland and Maud work together on the mystery of how these poets found each other and how far their relationship went, they also fall in love. Connections are made throughout the novel between Roland and Ash, the subject of Roland's Ph.D. dissertation, and between LaMotte and Maud, a LaMotte scholar revealed at the novel's end to be her descendant as well. LaMotte and Maud are both compared to Briar Rose, along with other fairy-tale heroines. The title of the novel reflects a central theme: both men are concerned with how they might love the women in their lives without interfering with their independence, and both women strive to return their love without having to surrender their own sense of self. But another kind of possession explored in Byatt's novel is self-

possession, with the two women – LaMotte and Maud – struggling with their confidence despite successes they have achieved as writers.

Initially, LaMotte repels Ash's wooing, saying that although women are taught to dread solitude ("oh the terrible tower, oh the thickets raised round it"), in truth "they have lied to us . . . . the Donjon may frown and threaten – but it keeps us very safe – within its confines we are free" (152). Like Frances Wingate in Drabble's *The Realms of Gold*, LaMotte sees the merits of retreating within "a thorny palisade of her own making" (Drabble, *Realms* 207). The story of "The Glass Coffin," included in a book of fairy tales written by LaMotte, illustrates that the poet had hoped for a life that privileged writing over human entanglements. In the story, a princess put into an enchanted sleep in a glass coffin at the summit of a glass mountain is rescued by a lowly tailor. Awakened and then kissed by him, "because he knew this was what he must do," the princess assumes they will be married. "You must be the Prince," she says, showing a familiarity with the plot line of "Briar Rose." But the tailor tells her, "Ah no, there you are mistaken. I am no more – and indeed no less – than a fine craftsman" (Byatt, *Possession* 73). The tailor's craft dominates his identity, but he is proud enough of the work that he feels it is as good as being a prince. Instead of marrying, the princess and the tailor together rescue her enchanted brother, the true object of her affection, and the three of them move into a castle in the woods. There, the brother and sister spend their days hunting, while the tailor perfects the work which constitutes his own great passion. But LaMotte finds this ideal harder to achieve in her own life. The image of the glass coffin shows how danger is implicit in a withdrawal from the world. Tempted by her relationships with Blanche Govier, the female painter who shares her home, and with Ash and the child they have

together, LaMotte plunges in and out of solitude throughout her career. Ultimately unable to deal simultaneously with the mounting pressures of her private life and the growing sophistication of her writing, she separates from Ash, gives their daughter to her sister to raise and ends her days lonely and on the verge of madness.

The modern-day lovers in the novel stand a better chance of making their love affair work. This is not, however, because modern women do not feel themselves overwhelmed by the pressures of life, or struggling with the choice, as LaMotte did, between "power" and "frailty" (Byatt, *Possession* 192). Roland compares Maud Bailey to "the princess on her glass hill" in LaMotte's fairy tale about the tailor, in considering that "Maud was a beautiful woman such as he had no claim to possess" (459). But self-possession is an even greater concern for her at this point in her life than possession by a man. Maud reveals herself to be exhausted by scholarship, so that she aspires to "[a]n empty bed in an empty room" (291), a vision which ominously recalls that of the suicidal academic in Byatt's story "The Chinese Lobster." A survivor of the "cut-throat ideological battles" (337) that some academics in the novel can not endure, she wants only "to hear her own voice, saying something simple and to the point" (344). Her ambivalence concerning academia is evident when she says that the literature that she still cares about is that which "could survive our education" (62).

Byatt describes the subject matter of her fiction as "habits of mind – the nature of the imagination, the ways in which different people take in the world, and the uses they make of what they think or see" (Vinson 214). Highly imaginative characters, like Maud in *Possession*, who makes a living out of her imagination, are important to Byatt's fiction. In Byatt's story "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye," Gillian Perholt, who had

visions of "wolves, bears and small grey men" as a child, and now, as a narratologist travelling to international conferences, sometimes sees Death sitting in her audience, releases a genie from a bottle she buys in a Turkish bazaar. Her brief love affair with the genie, conducted in a hotel room during a conference, strengthens her at a difficult time in her life following her husband's abandoning her for a younger woman, and her children leaving home. In Byatt's novel *Still Life* (1985), Marcus Potter, who in the earlier novel *The Virgin in the Garden* (1978) suffered from hallucinations and psychic communication with a biology master, turns his talent for ecstasy in natural settings into a career as a biologist, sustained by his awareness of "a God of overflowing order and intricacy, ovals and ants" (Byatt, *Still* 239). These works show how the proper application of the imagination in Byatt's world might completely alter a character's life.

Imagination has the same power in Drabble's novels. According to Margaret Gullette, for Drabble's characters, "[e]ven the idea of joy or relief may carry one through" (Gullette 94). What is more, Drabble maintains that imagination could actually change the world. According to Pamela Bromberg, most of Drabble's novels demonstrate "exuberant faith in the apocalyptic power of the imagination to create golden worlds" (Bromberg 55). In Drabble's novel *The Middle Ground* (1980), Kate Armstrong feels disgusted by her messy house, its failings made more apparent to her by the visit of an Iraqi refugee she is boarding. "Why ever did she go on so resolutely being what she was?" Kate wonders. "What failure of imagination kept her within her narrow limits?" (Drabble, *Middle* 101). But the novel ends with Kate delighting in her vision of an undecided future, showing the extent to which she is sustained by her imagination where others might be defeated :

> Anything is possible, it is all undecided. Everything or nothing. It is all in the future. Excitement fills her, excitement, joy, anticipation, apprehension. Something will happen. The water glints in the distance. It is unplanned, unpredicted. Nothing binds her, nothing holds her. It is the unknown, and there is no way of stopping it. (248)

For other characters in Drabble's novels, imagination expands the world. Archaeologist Frances Wingate in *The Realms of Gold* (1975) discovers the ancient city of Tizouk because she imagined it: "imagine a city and it exists" (Drabble, *Realms* 24). Anthony Keating, a property developer in Drabble's grim novel *The Ice Age* (1977), feels that a gas meter he purchases on a piece of land is "radiant with significance." From time to time he drives out of his way "for the pleasure of gazing at it." It means as much to him as the cathedral he saw in childhood from his bedroom window: "It lifted the heart. Up soared the heart like a bird in the chest, up through its light and airy metal shell, to the changing, so much before unnoticed sky" (Drabble, *Ice* 32). The gas meter fires Anthony's imagination, strengthening his faith in the future of England while those around him are in despair, and inspiring him with notions of how the landscape should change to accommodate that future.

In Murdoch's novels, characters might be blessed with imaginative powers so great that they experience moments of transcendence, akin to a religious visitation. As Elizabeth Dipple points out, one might attain goodness in Murdoch's world simply through a state of mind, through "joy, feelings of transcendence, love and religious elevation" (Dipple 79). In *The Philosopher's Pupil*, George McCaffrey sees a flying saucer while he is crippled with remorse over the death of his former professor, whom he

believes he has killed. He sees the saucer over the moors near a ring of ancient stones. It looks like a burning star: "It's killing me, thought George, it is a death thing, this is my death that I prayed for" (Murdoch, *Philosopher's* 557). Afterwards, he seems a much gentler person, reuniting with his long-suffering wife and looking after his mother when she hurts herself in a fall. In *The Green Knight* (1993), the mysterious Peter Mir, who may have died during an assault and come back to life, has a strange experience with his assailants in the same forest clearing on a later night. Afterwards, he finds that he has recovered his religious faith. The others had seen what appeared to be a falling star, a burning airplane or a bolt of lightning crashing into Peter and filling him with light: Mir looked "as if he were burning, only he was not being consumed, he was simply composed of light, and grown taller, a pillar of light, burning, shining" (Murdoch, *Green* 281). In *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), retired theater director Charles Arrowby falls asleep in the yard of his beach house, thinking about all the relationships he has destroyed with his selfishness, and wakes up to witness a shower of falling stars. After this "extraordinary" (Murdoch, *Sea* 145) vision, Charles begins to seriously reassess the way he relates to the world. Peter Conradi acknowledges that "Murdoch's interest in the supernatural is a problem for some readers," but he argues that her references to flying saucers, levitation, ghosts, and even the appearance of Christ across the breakfast table in *Nuns and Soldiers* (1980) "should not obscure for us that what is supernatural in Murdoch is principally the imagination itself" (Conradi 142).

As has been discussed, however, imagination by itself has less moral force for these novelists than imagination married to action. In Byatt's *Possession*, emerging from her secluded scholarly existence to be with Roland and to pursue with him the literary

mystery comprised of the writings of LaMotte and Ash makes Maud vulnerable to additional pressures besides those of her academic career. She struggles to choose between her desire to be with Roland and the threat that he poses to her autonomy, but it is clear that without him she leads a narrow existence. This is illustrated by Maud's frequent association with cold in the novel. After Roland and Maud meet, there is "a frostiness between them" (Byatt, *Possession* 143) for a long time. Her facial features are "[i]cily regular" (549). Roland felt that "[h]er voice lacked warmth" (46). "She thicks men's blood with cold" (39), says Roland's fellow English scholar Fergus Wolff, who once had a brief affair with Maud. At the same time, Maud worries about sacrificing that narrow existence in order to be with Roland. Writing a paper on metaphor with Roland in the room, Maud considers this conflict:

> If he went out of the room it would be grey and empty.
>
> If he did not go out of it, how could she concentrate? (467)

She tells Roland, "I keep my defences up because I must go on doing my work" (549), and he guarantees her that if they live together, "I wouldn't threaten your autonomy" and "I could let you be." Maud is dubious about this possibility, saying, "Oh, love is terrible, it is a wrecker" (550). And true to her prediction, the end of the novel shows that some kind of "death and destruction" has taken place as a result of their finally sleeping together, and that they find themselves now in "the aftermath." At the same time, however, spring has arrived:

> In the morning, the whole world had a strange new smell. It was the smell of the aftermath, a green smell, a smell of shredded leaves and oozing resin, of crushed wood and splashed sap, a tart smell, which bore some relation to the smell of

bitten apples. It was the smell of death and destruction and it smelled fresh and lively and hopeful. (551)

If something has been destroyed by the relationship between Maud and Roland, this violence, it is implied, has cleared the way for a more vital existence for both of them.

Some works of literature use "Briar Rose" to describe a psychic distress so acute that it has no apparent solution. This is how Murdoch uses the tale in *The Unicorn* (1963). In these cases, the protagonist can only function in solitude. In British novelist Helen Dunmore's *A Spell of Winter* (1995), Catherine read fairy tales by the Grimms and Hans Christian Andersen as a child, and she has carried their motif of isolated women with her into her adult life. After her mother fled to France and her father was committed to an insane asylum, Catherine and her brother Rob became lovers, feeling that they only had each other. Catherine became pregnant with Rob's child and endured a horrifying abortion arranged by a sympathetic housemaid. Then she killed her governess by striking her with a spade in the woods, believing that the woman knew about the unnatural relationship between the children. After Rob left suddenly for Canada, having grown frightened of his now teenage sister, Catherine decided that she had had enough of human contact, and shut herself away in the empty family home for the rest of her days. There, she is wooed fruitlessly for years by a wealthy neighbour, who might be sympathetic of Catherine's troubles if she were willing to share them with him. He warns Catherine, "Things don't go on forever, waiting until you want them," and teases her by wondering, "when I next come, will the roses have grown right up the castle walls?" (Dunmore 253). But Catherine resists his efforts to bring her out of her exile. "You always have to go back inside," she has learned. "Inside is what you have

made, and it waits for you" (199).

Imprisoned characters who do marry are not necessarily opened up to new possibilities by the experience. In British writer Anita Brookner's novel *Lewis Percy* (1989), Lewis, an English graduate who has written on heroes in literature, thinks of the agoraphobic Tissy Harper as Briar Rose, and aims to "free" and "wake" her from her "strange enchantment" (Brookner, *Lewis* 68) by wooing and marrying her. Meeting Tissy at the library where she works, Lewis considers that he has never seen a woman "so spectacularly virginal." His comparing Tissy subsequently to a stone statue of the Virgin Mary indicates that Lewis is not really interested in her except as a symbol, and that her imprisonment furnishes part of her appeal for him: "Although Tissy Harper, with her prayerful hands and downcast eyes, might not provide the promised sins of the flesh, she still represented a quest and a safeguard" to Lewis (56). He is disappointed when after their marriage Tissy fails to undergo a metamorphosis, but maintains instead her secretive aspect:

> Such duties as a married woman might expect to have were construed by her with a narrowness that accorded with her narrow face, her narrow frame, and although Lewis would wistfully try to detain her in the early mornings before they were both dressed she would break away almost sternly, as if he were asking her to infringe certain rules. These were not rules of propriety – for she assented to his overtures without demur – but rather rules of employment. (93)

Tissy's anxiety about the outside world, it would seem, includes Lewis: she signals to her husband in the same way as "[s]he proclaimed to the world, 'You may come so close and no closer'" (110-111). Frustrated by their failure to communicate, Lewis flees the

marriage and the country at the novel's end with his friend's sister Emmy, a gregarious actress.

A woman's refusal to surrender a circumscribed existence, when love affairs offer her a way out, is also the subject of Murdoch's *The Unicorn* (1963). In Murdoch's novel, however, there are tragic results. In the novel, Marian Taylor, a schoolteacher, takes a position as governess at a remote British country house called Gaze Castle. When she arrives there, she is somewhat surprised to learn that her charge is not a child but a grown woman, the mysterious Hannah Crean-Smith, to whom she is to serve as a lady's companion. Seven years previous, Hannah and her husband Peter quarrelled after he learned of her affair with a neighbour's son, Philip Lejour, a poet. They struggled on a cliff side and Peter fell and was injured, but survived. Hannah blames herself for the affair and the accident, and so has permitted her husband to confine her to Gaze Castle, while he lives in New York. Besides Hannah, the household is comprised of half a dozen servants and retainers whose jobs are never made clear to Marian, some of them evidently employed by Hannah's husband to keep her there, some of them scheming against him. Hannah refuses to leave the house, although she seems unhappy there and is given to sudden hysterics. Throughout the novel, she is compared to Briar Rose, with the difference that Hannah has endorsed her own imprisonment. When Marian goes too far in trying to persuade Hannah of her right to freedom, the situation ends in tragedy: Hannah flees, throws herself over the cliff where her husband fell seven years previously, and is killed.

The residents of Gaze Castle are portrayed as always drowsy or sleeping. Finding that she is expected to nap in the afternoon and then retire for the night at ten o'clock,

Marian "was amazed at how much they seemed to sleep" (Murdoch, *Unicorn* 26-27). Characters fall asleep despite their best efforts, sometimes at critical moments. There is a "sleepy, dragging routine" at Gaze Castle, so that the days "seemed of immense length" (28). It is, Marian thinks, as if Gaze were "the castle of the sleeping beauty" (112). Hannah, who wears medieval dress "like some brave beleaguered lady in a legend" (51-52), is compared to Briar Rose. Hannah's face customarily "wore a dreamy expression" (41); she was usually "somnolent" (53). Hannah tells Effingham Cooper, a friend of the neighbours who loves her, "You know, it's odd, but I've almost stopped thinking in terms of time" (100), bringing to mind the heroine of "Briar Rose" who awakens after a hundred years of sleep to find her surroundings virtually unchanged. Effingham tells Hannah: "I feel we must do something, anything, to break this spell. For it *is* a spell, a spell on all of us, we're all walking round and round in our sleep" (98). Characters in the novel seem paralysed when called upon to act. Max Lejour, who lives next door, has been too "fascinated" (96) by Hannah's situation to take action to help her, and several other characters similarly attribute their inaction to magic or a spell.

One reason that characters who claim to be concerned about Hannah's well-being fail to take action to help her is that secretly, some of them – especially the men – enjoy contemplating her isolation. They have come to think of Hannah as a legend, a symbol, not a real person. Chapter Five of this essay addressed the crime it is in Murdoch's world to fail to take others seriously, although one can also poison a relationship by intruding too much into another's consciousness. In this novel, Effingham feels a "strange, guilty pleasure" concerning Hannah's confinement (Murdoch, *Unicorn* 73). He realizes that a large part of his love for Hannah is "contributed by his own imagination" and

acknowledges that it is an "ordeal" reconciling that with the real woman every time he meets her (81). Hannah's situation is described as "romantic" by a number of characters. Hannah tells Effingham, "I'm a story for you. We remain on romantic terms" (91). Effingham suggests that "Hannah makes romantics of us all" (78). He tells her, "I let you have your dreams. And of course I'm still romantic too. You are my romantic vice" (100). Max Lejour reinforces to Effingham that people suffer from "romanticism" in their perception of Hannah (99), that Hannah is an "image . . . . But we must also see her as real" (98). Effingham realizes that "He had not really loved Hannah, he had loved a dream figure which he had been able to superimpose upon her – as long as she was chaste and untouched" (267).

Hannah complains that "nobody can be with me on the inside. Nobody can *see*" (Murdoch, *Unicorn* 92), but it is clear that she has taken how others see her to heart. She enjoys being an "image" to others, as she enjoys her suffering at their hands. Murdoch has said that, as a writer, she is interested in how "people create myths about themselves and are then dominated by the myths" (Bellamy 138). In this way, Hannah has "claimed" her husband's accident for herself, "and one has no right to take it from her" (67), says Denis Nolan, the bailiff at Gaze Castle. Max Lejour points out that "to be powerless, to be a complete victim, may be another source of power" (107), and Hannah admits that she has derived pleasure from the mistaken impression others have had of her, that "I needed my audience, I lived in your gaze like a false God." She says, "I have lived on my audience, on my worshippers, I have lived by their thoughts . . . . I lived by your belief in my suffering" (249). When Marian first meets Hannah, she sees "the lovely face a little tired . . . like that of a person long ill," and she "wondered at once whether Mrs. Crean-

Smith was not, in fact, somehow, ill, and she had a guilty little feeling of revulsion" (23). Now Marian is even more firmly convinced that "Mrs. Crean-Smith might be not always, entirely, absolutely right in the head" (42-43), given her enthusiasm for suffering.

After a time, Marian begins to feel herself drawn into Gaze Castle's atmosphere of sleepy inaction. Marian "while not sleepy felt exhausted, as if her energy were sapped simply by resisting some influence upon her of her too silent surroundings" (Murdoch, *Unicorn* 38). Hannah had joked with Marian upon her arrival at Gaze Castle, "I do hope you won't mind being imprisoned with us here miles from anywhere" (21), and now Marian begins to feel like she really is a prisoner, like she is somehow prevented from leaving: "Something behind her, something that she feared, seemed yet like a magnet holding her back" (56) so that one night she is afraid to leave the house to walk in the garden. But as an outsider, Marian brings common sense to Hannah's household, and she maintains throughout the novel her sense that Hannah's living arrangements are inappropriate. She sees that there is something fundamentally wrong with the fact that Hannah's vulnerability makes her attractive to men; having just separated from her boyfriend because she is convinced he does not really love her, Marian argues, "No one should be a prisoner of other people's thoughts" (227). And if Hannah embraces her circumscribed existence, Marian believes "it can't be right to give way to that sort of thing" (66). She says of Hannah, "It sounds to me as if she were really under a spell, I mean a psychological spell, half believing by now that she's somehow got to stay here. Oughtn't she to be wakened up? I mean it's all so unhealthy, so unnatural" (67-68). Marian subsequently plots with some of the other characters to remove Hannah forcibly from her imprisonment.

But Murdoch's novel proves that in some cases, Briar Rose can not be roused against her will. Marian believes that Hannah "began to find her situation sort of interesting, spiritually interesting" simply because people "have got to survive, and they'll always invent some way of surviving, of seeing their situation as tolerable" (Murdoch, *Unicorn* 129). She thinks that they can "shatter the spell" (124) of Hannah's solitude with an act of violence, but more bloodshed results from Marian's efforts on Hannah's behalf than she had anticipated. The two men who love Hannah first try to persuade her to leave Gaze Castle. Effingham tells Hannah, "I'm wanting to take you away from here, to take you back into ordinary life" (98). But Hannah objects, "We just haven't got that sort of life to live, that sort of love to live. We have run out of life, at least I have" (99). Subsequently, the neighbour's son Philip, whose affair with Hannah seven years previous had sparked her husband's rage and led to his fall from the cliff, tells Hannah, "You have woken up. You are awake now. Come, move, act, before you fall asleep again" (254). But neither of them manages to persuade Hannah, so accustomed has she become to having her movements restricted.

They must resort to violence, under Marian's guidance. Marian's original plan to force Hannah into a car and drive her away is unsuccessful, and sends the strange household of Gaze Castle into a cycle of violence which ends up harming Hannah rather than helping her. Effingham has always feared "the violence that lay behind the legend of the sleeping beauty" (Murdoch, *Unicorn* 177). He feels that in Hannah's case, "[t]here was violence, violence asleep in that situation" (128). Marian had wanted to persuade Hannah, "make her realize that she *is* free and that she's got to make her own decisions" (130), but as soon as Hannah is given the opportunity to make a decision, she shoots

Gerald, her bailiff, with a shotgun, killing him, then flees Gaze Castle to the cliff side where she throws herself over and is killed. As in Shakespeare's plays, bystanders are dragged into the cycle of violence as well. Hannah's husband Peter, driving in from the airport, is swept off the road by a flood and drowned – or maybe Denis Nolan, the gamekeeper, drove the car off the road deliberately. Hannah's former lover Philip supposedly shoots himself accidentally while cleaning his gun.

Byatt's story "Crocodile Tears" (*Elementals*, 1998) illustrate how a combination of action and imagination might free a character from the temptation to withdraw from the world into exhausted solitude. In the story, Patricia Nimmo, a housewife who has just lost her husband to a stroke, journeys to Nîmes, France, where she surprises herself, and the friend she has made in a Swedish businessman staying at her hotel, by her frequent impulse to throw herself from balconies and rooftops. When Nils begins to woo her, Patricia resists him with determination, until he tells her a fairy tale about a man imprisoned in a block of ice. Patricia sees that, feeling unable to reconstruct her life after her loss, she has shut herself off from all of its possibilities, like the man in the fairy tale. In a dream she witnesses two gladiators hacking each other to pieces in the ancient arena of Nîmes, then being magically healed, only to fall to blows again:

> All the red blood, in which terrible strips and slivers of flesh, external and internal, floated and stuck, turned back. All the carnage flowed back, quickly, into the two men, peeling off the sand, shrinking and vanishing in stains on the buckram, so that they were again fit, pale figures, surrounded by gleaming pristine blades. And then they bowed to her, turned somersaults in the swept sand, and began all over again, hacking thrusting, bleeding. (Byatt, "Crocodile"

72-73)

Living well, Patricia has learned, means suffering at the hands of others and being renewed by them, again and again. The only alternative is to withdraw entirely from the pleasures of living. This is the lesson that "Briar Rose" teaches, when its heroine emerges from her long sleep. It is one which Hannah Crean-Smith in Murdoch's *The Unicorn* refuses to acknowledge, at her cost, and which the heroines in Byatt's *Possession*, feeling divided between work and romance, accept with hesitation. Out of the three novels I have explored in this chapter, only in Drabble's *The Realms of Gold* does a character – Frances Wingate – become open to the possibility that she will not always be able to forestall the pain of living that accompanies joy and satisfaction. At the end of Byatt's "Crocodile Tears," Patricia takes action based on what she has seen in her vision. She and Nils leave together for Sweden, anticipating what the sheltered housewife imagines as "the unknown North, the green fjords, the ice, the lights" (Byatt, "Crocodile" 77). An entirely new world has opened before them, and courage is all that is required for its exploration. But for most characters in these novels who share with Briar Rose an attraction to solitude, breaking out of it as the fairy tale's heroine does, in order to participate in the greater community, proves to be very difficult, if not impossible.

Conclusion

Fairy tales have been called universal. Royall Tyler, who has translated for publication both French and Japanese fairy tales, says that they are "the timeless expression of the genius of a whole people, or even of humanity itself" (Tyler xix). However, the risks that artists take when they borrow folklore from another culture for use in their work deserve examination. When Australian Rodney Hall suggests, in his novel, *The Second Bridegroom* (1988), that "however important our history is to us our fairytales go deeper" (Hall 67), he implies that folklore is intimately connected with the society that produces it. Italo Calvino, on the other hand, proposes that regional variations in fairy tales matter little, serving only to dress up themes essential to the stories in any culture: "The folktale clothes its motifs in the habits of diverse societies" (Calvino, Intro. xxviii). He argues, "The lesson we can learn from a myth lies in the literal narrative, not in what we add to it from the outside" (Calvino, "Lightness" 4). A.S. Byatt makes a similar argument in a recent essay, where she mentions her disapproval of feminist rewritings of classical fairy tales. She says, "The philosophical tale is one thing. The tale with allegorical, or political designs on the reader is another" (Byatt, *Old Tales* 143). To many folklore scholars writing today, fairy tales are politically charged narratives. And whatever Byatt may say in protest, her novels, as well as the fiction of Iris Murdoch and Margaret Drabble, demonstrate that politics inform British writers' use of fairy tales from other traditions. The way that class and racial difference are handled in novels by these authors is deserving of further study; the way they use fairy tales might provide an introduction to those themes in their work.

Social origins influence our engagement with fairy-tale characters – Red Riding Hood and her wolf, 'Ala al-Din and his genie of the lamp, Askeladden, or the Ash Lad (the male Cinderella of Norwegian fairy tales) – and with the strange scenarios so familiar to middle-class readers: marriage to beasts, the scaling of glass mountains, the uninvited fairy who has her revenge. Murdoch, the Oxford-educated daughter of a civil servant, and Drabble and Byatt, who attended Cambridge like their mother and their father, a barrister and circuit judge, write from a position of privilege when they intimate their affection for fairy tales. As Peter Conradi has noted of Murdoch's social range, "she says little about work and often appears to take money for granted" (Conradi 4). These novelists' assumption that fairy tales have an application to the real world might not be shared by those who grew up in a less privileged environment. In Irish novelist Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* (1999), Henry, a homeless boy, is chased by police after cursing the procession through Dublin of King Edward VII, because "I didn't even know what a king was; no one had ever read me a fairy tale. He looked like an eejit" (idiot)" (Doyle 52). In British novelist Muriel Spark's *A Far Cry From Kensington* (1988), Mrs. Hawkins discovers that her lover does not know anything about fairy tales because he grew up in a slum. The discovery makes her consider, "I had never before realized how the very poor people of the cities had inevitably been deprived of their own simple folklore of childhood." It could be argued, therefore, that Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt neglect certain social realities in their concentration on middle- or upper-class characters who find European fairy tales to be a source of reassurance and guidance.

Attitudes to racial difference in these novels are also deserving of further attention. As we have seen, Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt use European fairy tales

throughout their fiction to address sometimes painful realities experienced by their characters, from conflicts between parents and children, to romantic difficulties, to empowerment. For these writers, the German tales of the Grimm brothers present a convincing picture of everyday life. But *The Arabian Nights* – a loose association of Indian, Persian, Chinese and Arabic folk tales dating, in its written form, from the thirteenth century – is used by them to describe things that are ephemeral or unobtainable, or that otherwise have no bearing on real life.

Also known as the *Thousand and One Nights*, the tales were translated first into French between 1704 and 1717 by Antoine Galland (1646-1715), an Orientalist who had assisted the French ambassador in Greece, Syria and Palestine for four years and then worked with the ambassador in Constantinople for eleven years. Jack Zipes argues that "In some respects, the *Nights* are more important and famous in the West than they are in the Orient," because "[f]rom the moment Galland translated and invented his *Nights*, the format, style and motifs of the so-called Arabian tales had a profound effect on how other European writers were to define and conceive fairy tales" (Zipes, "Splendor" 58). If they have influenced other fairy tales, the *Nights* are certainly used differently by these British writers, who see them as appropriate for describing fantastic situations.

In Murdoch's novel *A Word Child* (1975), for instance, civil servant Hilary Burde falls in love with his friend's wife but takes liberties at the same time with her Indian maid, Biscuit, whom he sees as a sexual object at his disposal. He is guided in both relationships by his knowledge of the *Arabian Nights*. It's like "Hassan," he tells Kitty,[21]

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[21] Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (1975; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1976), 348, 369.

comparing their illicit romance to the *Nights* tale about a man tragically in love with another man's slave girl. It is clear even to Hilary by the end of the novel that he has formed ideas about Kitty and her maid that have nothing to do with who they really are. In Byatt's story, "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye," Gillian Perholt, who knows all about the *Nights* from her work as a narratologist, falls in love with a genie who emerges from a bottle she buys in a Turkish bazaar. But pitying his long history of service to others when he would rather return to what he describes as "a land of fire – where my kind play in the flames" (Byatt, "Djinn" 256). Gillian gives him the last of her three wishes. He promptly departs, and although he promises to return to visit from time to time, it is a promise in which she does not place much faith. Although Byatt is to be commended for making a genie into a three-dimensional character, he proves unobtainable to this sad, middle-aged woman whom we would really rather see swept away by him to some magical realm. In each case, authors who associate the themes of the Grimms' fairy tales with reality use *The Arabian Nights* to describe things that are lost, incomprehensible or unobtainable.

We can see this more clearly if we look at *The Middle Ground* (1980) in more detail. Drabble's novel tells the story of Kate Armstrong, a middle-aged Londoner who writes for a women's magazine. She accepts as a tenant Mujid, an Iraqi refugee from Baghdad who has come to London to learn English while he waits for his fiancee to leave Baghdad and join him. "You must be mad, said her friends, when she reported this latest domestic development, he's probably a terrorist. Don't be silly, Kate retorted, with her old panache, of course he's not a terrorist, he's just a boy, and he's got nowhere else to go." Mujid is not a boy, however, but a man of nearly thirty, although Kate has difficulty

thinking of him in those terms. She also has trouble understanding the life he has left behind in Iraq. She makes an effort, considering that "[b]efore he arrived, Kate did not even know where Iraq was" (Drabble, *Middle* 84). But, "[a]s Mujid spoke very little English, and Kate less French, she is never quite sure whether or not she has understood him properly" (83). She has learned that "The politics of Iraq are very confusing, and Mujid's alignments appear to her to be very odd" (84). Kate's struggle to understand a man from another country makes the reader dubious about her level of intelligence. Mujid is mostly interesting to Kate because of his exoticism; to her, the fact that he originates in a village on the Euphrates, "with its date palms and pomegranates and steamers" (169), means that he comes from "another world. An eclipse of centuries" (170). She wishes he would talk more about his home town and less about politics.

Joanne Creighton suggests that *The Middle Ground* shows England as increasingly international, that the novel argues that "global perspectives are . . . now imperative." She says that "many episodes in this book . . . highlight the increasingly international space in which modern Britons live" (Creighton, *Drabble* 103). At the novel's end, however, Mujid is still more an image from folklore for Kate than he is a real person. At the party that ends the novel, Mujid and his fiance give Kate a present to thank her for her hospitality: "How lovely, cried Kate, how lovely, they are slippers from the Arabian nights!" Her tenant is more pragmatic about the slippers: "Mujid smiled, and said, 'You should not be walking always with your feet on the cold floor'" (Drabble, *Middle* 267-268). Earlier in the novel Kate had opened a book of fairy tales she remembered from her childhood, and realized that many of the stories reflected her own experiences. Now she has recourse to fairy tales again, to see Mujid as something other

than who he really is. "What a nice man he is, thought Kate fondly . . . and how unlike what would have been her idea of an Iraqi, had she ever had one" (260). Her phrasing is significant, for Kate's ignorance and her fondness are inextricably connected in her impressions of her boarder. Her "idea of an Iraqi" informs all of their relations.

In each of these works, something lost or incomprehensible is described using imagery from the *Nights* tale. That writers who take fairy tales seriously should use *The Arabian Nights* to describe matters somehow divorced from reality is surprising given that their wealth of physical detail arguably grounds the *Nights* more firmly in reality than other tale traditions. Husain Haddawy, who in 1990 translated and edited a modern version of the *Nights*, argues this point in his introduction. He says, "The essential quality of these tales" is their "precise and concrete detail that (the storyteller) uses in a matter-of-fact way in description, narration, and conversation" (Haddawy, Intro. xi). While details vary among versions of the *Nights*, the richness of their descriptions almost always marks a significant point of distinction between these stories and European fairy tales, which Swiss folklore scholar Max Lûthi admired for what he called their "one-dimensionality," "depthlessness" and "abstract style."

And yet a number of British writers besides Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt read the *Nights* as fantasy. Jeannette Winterson's novel *The Passion* (1987) teaches, "Passion will not be commanded. It's no genie to grant us three wishes when we let it loose" (Winterson 144). In Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac* (1984), lonely romance novelist Edith Hope sees a socialite's glamorous life as the "Aladdin's cave" (Brookner 44) which might contain the cure to her unhappiness. (It proves not to.) In Beryl Bainbridge's novel *The Birthday Boys* (1991), which describes the doomed 1912 Scott expedition to

Antarctica, glaciers where all of the explorers eventually surrender their lives are repeatedly described using imagery from *The Arabian Nights*. In each case, the tale of 'Ala al-Din and his magic lamp is considered and then rejected as a reflection of a character's experiences in the real world; solutions to the problems of heartbreak, loneliness and human vulnerability are sought in the tale but not found.

As I have argued in this project, protagonists in novels by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt *do* discover solutions to modern problems in European fairy tales. Fairy tales inspire characters in their fiction to reconsider the isolation into which they have withdrawn from the world, and guide them in making more meaningful connections with family, lovers and the wider community. In Chapter One, we saw that the Grimms' "Hansel and Gretel" acquainted children and parents with the risks involved in intimate relationships, including the anxiety, resentment and guilt which can dominate those bonds. In Chapter Two, characters who had distanced themselves from their relatives in the course of achieving adulthood were subsequently forced, like the heroine of the Grimms' "Cinderella," to confront the impact of family on their life. In Chapter Three, animal-bridegroom tales taught protagonists that romances with beasts can be risky, although sexual and romantic love might also produce powerful changes in a person's life. Some characters decided to remain separate, while others broke the habit of solitude in order to love, taking a risk which connected them strongly with the network of obligations to others that Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt have said characterizes the moral world. In Chapter Four, we saw how Murdoch has used "Briar Rose" to shed light on romantic relationships and the autonomy and sense of equality that she feels are essential to their success. Chapter Five, using animal-bridegroom tales once more, examined the

conflict between selfhood and community which is not fully resolved in some of the fiction of these writers. In Chapter Six we saw how "Briar Rose," apart from offering guidance in love affairs, teaches characters who are in retreat from society that human engagements require suffering and renewal, and that the only alternative is to withdraw entirely from the pleasures of living.

As I have indicated, folklore scholars have remarked on the movement away from alienation and towards community that is a nearly universal feature of fairy tales, and a characteristic of the German tales of the Grimm brothers, among them. This is one dimension of fairy tales that has made them useful to Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt, who highlight a similar drive towards community in their fiction. Cultural materialist Jack Zipes observes, "The new realm to which the Grimm protagonist succeeds is that made possible through his or her own ingenuity and the help of other small creatures or outcasts. Generally speaking, the creation of the smart and successful fairy-tale hero is founded on a collective enterprise of collaborators" (Zipes, *Brothers* 81). Although Freudian Bruno Bettelheim sees the unions at the end of fairy tales as reflecting the union of disparate elements of the personality, he proposes that they also say something about the relationships available to an integrated personality. "But meritorious as such self-development is, and while it may save our soul, it is still not enough for happiness. For this, one must go beyond one's isolation and form a bond with the other . . . . The happy endings to fairy tales, in which the hero is united with his life's partner, tell this much" (Bettelheim 278). And formalist Max Lüthi has highlighted the connection in fairy tales between the hero's isolation and his ability to form relationships with a multitude: "The fairy tale sees man as one who is essentially isolated but who, for just this reason –

because he is not rigidly committed, not tied down – can establish relationships with anything in the world . . . . The fairy-tale hero is seemingly isolated, but has the capacity for universal relationships." Lüthi adds, "Certainly we can say that both are true portrayals of man" (Lüthi, *Once* 143).

The way that British writers use folklore from other traditions is deserving of further critical attention. However, the comfort that fairy tales of any tradition can provide us in the contemplation of the darker side of life – the loneliness, depression and despair that often figure in novels by Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt – is surely one argument in favour of their open exchange. In *The Arabian Nights*, Scheherezade, like many of the characters in her stories, tells tales to forestall death, not only her own but that of the other girls the king would marry and destroy after her if she failed. When, night after night, Dinarzad asks her sister to tell a tale "to while away the night," therefore, there is more than one kind of darkness which threatens them. The reader accustomed to the violence of European fairy tales will be taken aback by the seemingly casual attitude in *The Arabian Nights* to putting great numbers of people to the sword for minor transgressions. But then, death may be a universal point of contact for fairy tales, the flip side of their encouraging view of humanity which has been so useful to these novelists. The nobles in Giovanni Boccaccio's fourteenth-century tale collection, *The Decameron*, tell tales to pass the time in retreat from plague-ridden Florence. The gruesome executions in the Grimms' tales shock first-time adult readers, who will not remember barrels full of nails or birds pecking out eyes in the Disney films that had previously figured as their point of contact with the stories. "We'll sit down, in our shelter, and tell stories, like poor Scheherezade" (Swift, *Waterland* 298), says history

teacher Thomas Crick about the end of the world, in British writer Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983). As Murdoch, Drabble and Byatt demonstrate in their fiction, however, and as fairy tales have always made clear, close relationships with others can alleviate the sorrow which is sometimes a part of living, lighting the way forward to what Byatt has called, with characteristic ambivalence, "the happy ending against odds" (Fraser 128).

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